

FIRESTORM 2003 – PROVINCIAL REVIEW

Public Meetings

Kelowna

Part A

Gary Filmon:

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome back for some of you, and welcome to those of you who are here for the first time. We are glad to see you here at our public hearing process. This is day seven of my public hearing process throughout the Interior of British Columbia, reviewing the firestorms of this summer.

I indicated yesterday the basic parameters, the things that we are looking at, but it is the full range of issues to do with planning, preparation, response and recover. The intent is to arrive at conclusions after listening to people who were personally involved, individuals and organizations and to come up with a report for the government by the 15th of February.

So, thank you for coming. This afternoon we begin with a presentation from Sean Tracey. Welcome sir.

Sean Tracey:

Thank you. If I may approach, I have some handouts for yourselves so you can follow through as well as some additional materials for consideration.

GF That will be great. Thank you.

ST Mr. Filmon, Panel Members, my name is Sean Tracey and I am the Canadian Regional Manager for the National Fire Protection Association. In that role I represent an interest of fire and public fire safety issues across Canada on behalf of my international association which is NFPA. As a little bit of a background I will get into what NFPA is about. But I wish to thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak today. It is my aim to present to you the full spectrum of resources that are available from NFPA as possible consideration either from the extreme end of public education and standards development issues that could possibly be considered either provincially or municipally for adoption. And, I will get into some of those details shortly. As a little bit of an introduction we do know, and as we have experienced this summer here in British Columbia and we expect to continue to experience in the future, greater instances of wild land urban interface threats across North America. Our association has drawn upon our experiences predominantly in the Pacific Northwest region of North America, from those experiences to improve upon our codes and standards and make those opportunities available from that knowledge and learning to refine some of our programs. It is my intention to be able to present those to you.

Our programs, both in public education and standards are based on the community approach to solving this problem. No one single agency is responsible or can be held responsible for this, but it takes the actions of the entire community to be able to resolve, address, and mitigate the threat from wild land urban interface and I hope to be able to present to you some of those resources and tools that are available for consideration.

A little bit of an overview of whom and what NFPA is. Basically we are a global standards development organization. Our mission worldwide is to reduce the burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating scientifically based consensus codes, standards, research training and education. We are a not for profit organization. We generate our revenues based on revenue sales as well as on the sales of our codes and standards. We are an international standards development organization as defined by the World Trade Organization and basically we have over 75,000 members worldwide, and over 3,000 members in Canada at this point in time and currently 40 standards referenced in the National Building Code of Canada, National Fire Code of Canada and the British Columbia Building and Fire Codes. Basically at this point in time as well, we have emergency responders being certified to NFPA standards in every single province in Canada.

One of the aspect that I want to point out here is that during the B.C. Auditors Report of 2000, and I have identified or emphasized that one of our NFPA codes was NFPA 299 on wild land urban interface was identified as a U.S. Standard and I would like to point out that that could not be further from the truth. It is an international standard; nothing in the standard highlights that fact. NFPA is also a leader in developing public education programs. We have been providing and advocating fire prevention week for North America since 1922. Everybody is aware of Sparky the Fire dog who is our mascot. We have also provided 'learn not to burn' programs and since 1993 that program through our partnership with the Canadian Tire Foundation, Child Protection Foundation and Fire Prevention Canada has been in every single school in Canada – including translation into French. We have programs for First Nations Communities to learn not to burn preschool programs and recently introduced and widely adopted through Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario has been the 'risk watch program' which is an injury prevention program for the pre-kindergarten to grade 8 levels, which also now has had disaster modules that have been added in that address the threats of wild land interface fires, general preparedness, earthquakes, severe storm warnings, etc. So we are not completely unfamiliar with regard to the public education programs. What we do emphasize here from our experience in the wild land urban threat is that you need to address and have a program that addresses the seven key effective areas of a plan. Our programs and the standards that we point out give the resources to those groups and bodies that adopt those standards, those resources that allow them to basically take those standards, adopt them and cover off each of those seven main key areas. So all components are available from NFPA, they have been validated both from our experience and from groups such as the American Planners Association and others.

Basically, as a key example in addressing the legislation and development tenets, what we have basically from what we have pointed out in our codes and standards and education programs is that high and moderate risk areas can adapt to municipal by-laws that enforce fire-wise behaviour. That is specifically written into most of our codes and standards, requiring that to be done. As a good example, in a model perhaps for consideration by the inquiry is what has been happening in Ontario and Quebec where you have legislation mandated by the province that requires community-based risk assessments. And, if I can speak to the Ontario model, it goes one step further in actually requiring beyond just the simplified risk assessment model the requirement for a public education program in every municipality that addresses as a minimum requirement the education of all members of the population on smoke alarms, or smoke detectors. A good example here as possible for consideration from the inquiry is that those communities in British Columbia that are in direct threat from a wild land urban interface fire can consider then a requirement for mandatory public education program with all the tools and resources that are already out there for its members of its general population.

NFPA codes and standards require those right now. It is already written into our standards that those areas in high risk have public education programs. This giving municipalities that are then required to do that resources and means to then go forward and ask for resources to do this and to fund that. One of the key elements that we have talked about here is NFPA 1144, it and the other standards that I will be talking about today are actually written specifically so that they can be adopted and put into place either at the provincial or municipal level without wording changes. They are directly enforceable. As an example NFPA Fire Code NFPA 1 Uniform fire code recently released which combines two of the largest and most adopted codes in North America have a specific chapter that deals with a requirement for wild land urban interface. What protection means are there – it gives resources to the inspection and enforcement community, how they deal with those – this is an example of how building codes and fire codes can reflect and take those changes into consideration. There are no equivalent provisions right now either in the British Columbia Fire Code or in the National Fire Code of Canada. It empowers the authorities having jurisdictions in these areas with a specific means to be able to address and minimize threats in their jurisdictions, such as design review for new developments – being able to restrict access during high risk or high threat times – restricting outdoor fires and also getting into standards of design and construction for new developments. It requires in some cases fire roads, fire breaks, clearances from utilities to be ensured. We have a number of standards and I have presented those to you for further review and we can provide additional copies if needed. But basically we have a number of standards that specifically address those areas that you may be considering looking at for the municipal level. One of those is 1141 the standard of fire protection for plan building groups. And it specifically addresses those communities or areas that may be at risk because of limited fire, limited water supplies – if I can digress, the National Building Code, the National Fire Code, the B.C. Building Code by change and also the B.C. Fire Code specifically state and are designed as minimum requirements and there is an assumption stated clearly in the codes that it is based on adequate fire protection resources within those communities. This standard is intended to provide additional resources to those communities when those adequate resources, because of lack of water, lack of fire department personnel are not in place – and chapter 7 of that gets into added protection measures that can be put in place to compliment the building codes in those jurisdictions where we have those potential problems.

1142 is the standard on water supplies – any community development for new areas and construction – there are standards in place for calculation of water supply requirements – what they should have – standards of constructions – all elements that should be easily considered as part of a requirement before these developments go into place. – providing fire fighters should they be required to set up defensive operations to be provided with those adequate fire fighting water supplies. This is also the standard used by the Insurers' Advisory Organization in determining fire protection ratings under

the Fire Underwriters Survey Rating Classification system that is used throughout Canada and is used to determine fire insurance premiums in those communities.

1143 I won't spend too much time on this, but this is basically a standard that is out there to provide minimum standards of what a community should have in place if they are identified that they have a role in fighting wild land urban interfaces and it specifically addresses elements of preparedness. What a community plan needs to have in place and how you address issues of incident command management at the local level – issues that you have already been presented with.

The most important standard where I would like to spend a little more time is the 1144 standard for protection of life and property from wild land fire. This standard if I could identify as one key standard for possible consideration by the inquiry is this one – this is the standard that was also identified as NFPA 2999 in the 2000 B.C. Auditor Report where they assessed and interviewed fire department personnel and municipal officials on their awareness and protection measures in place in their communities. This standard basically again represents significant improvement over other earlier editions of the standards because of our past experiences. What it does require is minimum requirements for planning, construction, maintenance, and fire prevention, management for those parties that are responsible for protection in these communities. And the intent is basically to provide them with those resources so they can get effective public education programs, emergency planning programs, and have standards in place. The key behind this is that this will not stop wild land urban interface fires from occurring, but what it will do with these standards is provide a means or a measure for the emergency responders to at least have a chance of fighting some of these properties without facing the risk of being potentially cut off or having unrealistic expectations. It creates defensible communities. This is the key.

Chapters — basically it talks about adequate access egress in routes, evacuation, fuel modifications, water supply requirements, design building locations, fire protection during construction, community planning for protection of life and property. Basically what types of public education programs and what the community needs to have as elements of those public education programs? As a side note, the reason I am able to speak to you today is because I happen to be, by chance, in Richmond, B.C. to deliver presentations and workshops to the B.C. Building Officials Association and this was one of the subjects they asked to have presented on. So I thank you for the opportunity for that and this chance to be able to talk about this.

This standard also presents some key elements, basically property protected in this wild land urban interface zones and we know which zones they already are. We also have means of assessing individual properties written into that standard. Basically it says that all of those properties will undergo a wild land

fire risk and hazard severity analysis. And, based off of that analysis, standards of construction shall apply. And, in developing this standard I have to point out that this was developed in a consensus framework, both with industry, municipal leaders, city, fire services personnel, and members of the general public. So it does represent that balance between what's an acceptable level of risk and how much are we actually willing as a society to pay to cover and mitigate that risk. It requires all plans to be developed, to redress those risks that have been identified in the risk analysis, in those areas of high risk all construction plans are to be reviewed by the AHTA, the authority having jurisdiction. It has specifications for road design with access requirements so you do not have fire services personnel being cut off in trying to fight fires. It has standards for fire resistant building construction standards and how you adopt a multi-operational operational operation plan in those areas.

I have taken a lot of time here. I have noticed in both the B.C. Auditors Report of 2000 that it identified that there was possibility of no standard with regard to emergency preparedness plans. And NFPA 1600 is the standard for disaster emergency management business continuity programs. It is a standard that is out there. It is a unique standard in that it is equally applicable both to public and private entities, it's been adopted, it's been supported by The Partnership Towards Safe Communities a Canadian organization that is support both by the B.C. Fire Chiefs and by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs. This standard is recommended. It is also supported by FIMA who is a key signature on our document, the International Association of Emergency Managers, the National Emergency Managers Association as a means of certifying their programs. It has also been used by EMO Ontario and Manitoba for review of their framework with regard to restructuring and validating the EMO operations. So this is the standard of choice and I am told that Ontario will be looking at using this as certifying their means of public entities in the future.

1561 is our standard for emergency measures – emergency services incident command systems – I put that forward just for information purposes, but that would be another 1-1/2 hours to talk about that subject and I will not do that to you today. But, one aspect that NFTA has also been involved with is Fire-Wise Community Workshops. This is similar to the Fire Smart programs that you have heard about that have been developed here in Canada. The Fire Smart program is based off of the Fire-Wise programs. It is developed out of the United States. It is currently adopted in fifteen states as a model. There are a lot of resources that come from this that are still available free of charge to Canadians and Canadian organizations, but it has now been adopted in 46 states in the United States as a model. It is addressed and had workshops developed in over 2,000 communities and as of the end of December there will be over 2,000 personnel trained throughout North America to this program. It has also been reviewed by the American Planning Association as addressing some of those key elements. Basically providing a national

direction, it's a national level program. It has continuity. It is growing. We have a website at www.firewise.org. At last count we are getting close to 250,000 hits per month on the website from members of the general public downloading free information on emergency preparedness requirements, what actions they can take in some of their local areas, but basically it is a resource that is out there. There are free training videos that are actually available to fire services members, complete training on how to address wild land urban interface, both in video and DVD format, and complete workbooks that are available to the fire service. The only requirement for Canadians is to write away, get the information and pay the actual shipping charges. If you were in the U.S., or if there was a Canadian member of that coalition those costs would be waved.

As far as local support from our Fire-Wise programs, from our experience what we have shown is that prior to Fire-Wise going into a community to educate them on the risks we had generally basically a 30% response rate from people who failed to recognize the potential risks they were in, and that was on a 25% response rate. After having a workshop run in one of these communities and the education programs put in place, the metrics are basically showing here that we have an 80% awareness within the general population and a 90% response rate. This is separate from what we saw in the B.C. Auditors Report where it was emergency services personnel and municipal leaders being queried. This is from the general population in whole. These programs are effective. They are resources that we have. Again, the website is www.firewise.org and it's a great program; with free materials, education materials that is out there as well. I'm sorry, the actual number of hits is 280,000 a month of people actually going to our websites and getting that information. We have other resources available as well with support means, with a wild and fire management section through NFPA and basically I am here, I am a resource to the Canadian Community. I have contact means there. If there are any issues, questions or concerns, I am more than willing to assist and even addressing follow-up questions from this inquiry in the future.

GF Thank you very much, Mr. Tracey, this is very interesting information because we certainly don't want to reinvent the wheel if there are resources and information available that can form the basis of best practices that we would like to site in ways in which we can reduce the risks in the future. You obviously have a comprehensive data base with all sorts of materials that have been developed by people throughout the world. The most interesting thing I think is that you represent international standards, or at least national standards, but I believe it's international and, in trying to review what has been done and the capabilities of the various agencies and departments here in British Columbia I think we want to be able to compare ourselves to what are the accepted standards and the best practices and so this gives us a significant opportunity to do that.

Last evening we had a presentation from an individual with respect to fire retardant. Do you have – you indicated you are a standard granting body. Do you – shall we say licence or approve materials like fire retardants?

ST One thing we have not gotten to and we avoid is the actual aspect of product certification. That's usually left up to other standards development organizations such as ULC, CSA, CGSB or others. Its felt that would be different from the actual public fire life safety issues as opposed to certification of product becomes another sort of a revenue-driving issue for some of those standards development organizations. We have absolutely made sure that we have a separation from that. We develop standards based on best practices based on industry and based on accepted standard and past record and performance and based on the latest of science that again have that balance and how far are we willing to go for cost. But, no, we do not certify products.

GF Okay. Thank you very much then for bringing forward all this material and we will certainly access your website as well. Thank you.

Our next presenter is Mr. Paul MacNamara – is he here? Not here. Oops – sorry! Welcome. (Thank you).

Paul MacNamara:

Sorry, I thought I was on a little later – no problem.

Good afternoon. My name is Paul MacNamara. I am a registered professional forester. I began working in the forest industry on Vancouver Island in 1965. I was transferred by Crown Zellerbach to Kelowna ten years later. I was their Woodlands Manager when the operation was sold in 1992 and I subsequently became a small forestry consulting business here in the Okanagan.

In early September of this year I had the opportunity to work in association with Dobson Engineering for the City of Kelowna on forestry and logging matters related to the aftermath of the Okanagan Mountain Park fire. I engaged several colleagues to assist me and the work has involved two projects. The first was arranging for the fire salvage logging of a city park and the second was managing a forestry and logging liaison role for the city. This project involved two of my colleagues who met with the owners of private forest land that had burned. They provided some advice to those who are either already salvage logging or who were perhaps contemplating doing so.

I am here today to present my own views and opinions and not on behalf of either Dobson Engineering or the City of Kelowna. Nonetheless I am pleased that both have encouraged me to make this presentation.

My comments refer to the areas in and around Kelowna which were impacted by the fire. However, they are applicable to other areas in B.C. which have recently been burned. Natural Resources Canada has a mountain pine beetle initiative in place for the province of British Columbia. It is led by the Pacific Forestry Centre in Victoria and has partnership arrangements with the B.C. Ministry of Forests and others. One of the programs under this initiative is relevant to my presentation today and I hope you will bear with me. The private forest lands rehabilitation program provides non-industrial private forest land owners with financial and technical assistance in the planning, the management and control efforts of the mountain pine beetle and for the rehabilitation of their lands.

My objective here today is to encourage this review to recommend that a parallel program be initiated by the federal government to assist private forest landowners who have suffered losses from wild fires as opposed to losses from insect attacks. I will explain my rationale later in this presentation.

The problem: We've got almost 26,000 hectares of land that were burned in the fire. Of these about 3,000 hectares are privately owned and either within the City of Kelowna or in the Regional District of Central Okanagan. My comments today apply only to the private forest properties.

Let's talk about the condition of the trees. The tree species in the fire interface zone are mainly Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir. Within the fire

perimeter many pockets or islands of timber have escaped and some trees that were scorched will survive. However, the vast majority is dead over the whole area and of these some were dead before the fire, some are severely burned and some are too small to produce merchantable logs. In most cases leaving the dead trees is not an option. They are a serious safety hazard to anyone walking through the area and they will be an ongoing fire hazard, particularly if left standing. As a little side note here, some misinformed people believe that a burned forest is no longer a fire hazard. This is simply not true. Forest health is a big concern to all of us. Before the fire there was a very significant Douglas Fir bark beetle population in the area. I understand that we can expect it to become much more serious now as this insect favours weakened trees to attack. And the blue stain(?) found in Ponderosa Pine is transported from tree to tree by mountain pine beetles. And so we need some plans to deal with the post-fire insect problem and we need them soon.

The shelf life of these burned trees will depend to some extent on the weather. Log values will quickly decline. Nonetheless many of them are merchantable if they can be salvaged without delay. But time is running out.

I will talk a little bit about the ground conditions on these private lands. The ground conditions in the burned area are variable but much of it is relatively flat and easy to log without causing environmental damage. Some areas are steeper and more difficult. However, virtually all the dead trees should be clear cut and the area rehabilitated whether they are merchantable or not. We are talking about public safety and future fire hazard. The biggest problem by far lies in the areas with creeks running through them, particularly where the side slopes range from 50 to 100% for distances of 100 meters or so down into the bottom of the creek draw. This is quite common. These drainages present very difficult problems for logging and only a few have suitable road access. The trees cannot be conventionally logged without building skid trails and dragging the logs up or down the slope. This type of operation would cause serious erosion and would exacerbate the already very serious water quality problems in the creeks below, all of which empty into Okanagan Lake.

Now we are all concerned about the potential for landslides and debris flows and flooding. And as you heard and saw yesterday during the presentation by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, we have already had an example of these events in October. A pretty sobering experience for all of us. It didn't take long to demonstrate it. For many years foresters and loggers operating in the Okanagan watersheds have recognized that water is the most important single resource that our operations may influence. I say that from personal experience, and it makes all kinds of sense.

But these situations that I have just been talking about near water courses present more serious challenges to forestry planning and they call for unusual solutions. These land owners are faced with the prospect of expensive salvage logging on these difficult areas, both carefully and quickly – if for no other

reason than to reduce the risk to public safety and a contribution to downstream water problems.

Now a little bit about the land ownership itself and the position of owners. Some owners with tracts of burned forested land have been able to conduct their logging operations in an environmentally safe manner on relatively gentle slopes. They have generated some revenue from selling the logs and will probably do a fine job of rehabilitation. But they are in the minority. Others are anxious to do the right thing but they simply cannot afford to start hiring consultants, logging contractors, etc., particularly if they have lost their home and in some cases their home-based business as well. Many were under-insured and some were not insured at all. These unfortunate people understandably have higher priorities than coping with expensive logging operations. But they worry about their liability from danger trees and environmental problems on their property even while they try to get their lives back in order.

From an environmental standpoint the worst situation is with those properties that have steep slopes leading down into creeks and sometimes the properties straddle both sides of the creeks. These water sheds are shared by multiple landowners but as the property boundaries were never intended to facilitate logging, they are often a hindrance to the logical development of salvage plans – and treating each property separately compounds the logging difficulty. Unless the neighbouring properties are similarly handled, an owner could well ask why would I even consider this undertaking unless my neighbours do the same thing. And the landowner who did do the right thing may be left thinking – why did I go to the expense of doing this and what is going to happen to my property as a result of nothing being done upstream on my neighbours' properties.

These are very good questions for if the adjacent properties are left untreated there is the likelihood of burned trees falling down the slope over time and creating a serious fire hazard at the bottom, as well as damaging the stream banks and contributing to more erosion – the kind of stuff we saw in those slides yesterday. We saw the ones of the debris in front of the creek – well that's what I'm getting at.

In the meantime, the standing burned trees pose a very real danger to anyone walking through them, or along the valley bottom. Most of them don't have a good root system and they can come over at any time. And trees that are falling over and ending up in the creek are a very serious matter. The owners are legitimately concerned about their liability. They should be. These situations have to be addressed or else we will all be faced with very serious environmental and public safety issues. Dealing with single or isolated properties in a drainage will not help the overall problem.

I have got a suggested solution – or at least a partial one. I am proposing that the federal government provide technical and financial assistance for private forest land owners whose properties have burned. The watersheds will be best served by a coordinated plan to systematically salvage logs and rehabilitate every burned property within the drainage. A hit and miss operation will simply not be effective. Expensive logging methods will be required in some cases. The post-logging rehabilitation plans would address slope stabilization, reforestation and debris disposal and include measures to mitigate the likelihood of future interface fires. Now all of these are important points. They have to deal with them. With a coordinated plan the unit cost for each phase – that is the planning, the logging, the slope stabilization, reforestation, the debris disposal, etc., would drop as a result of the scale of the project.

And now, as we know, there is a very strong link between mountain pine beetle epidemic and ensuing wild fires. The federal government's program is intended to assist private forest landowners in coping with mountain pine beetle problems. I believe that this program could very easily be adapted and expanded to apply to wild fire situations on private forest land.

Please note that I am not suggesting that a wild fire program be developed at the expense of the existing program in pine beetle. That is not the case here. I am referring to an additional program with its own funding.

Now let me take a moment to explain some of the elements of this existing program. And these are quotes: *Through the program land owners can obtain technical and funding assistance for activities relating to mountain pine beetle management, control and rehabilitation on non-industrial private lands. This program applies to lands between ten and 2,000 hectares in size, where the main focus or the potential use is forest management. Participants may be an individual, a family, a partnership, a society, or a small business. The cost of the program is to be shared with land owners contributing a minimum of 20% of the total project eligible costs. This contribution may be in cash or in kind and any revenue from timber harvesting will be factored into the cost sharing. The maximum program contribution is \$25,000 annually – now keeping in mind that this is the beetle program, where I suggest that it is very, very close to what we need right here.*

Surely the problems faced by the private forest landowners following wild fire are worthy of similar treatment. We already have the template. My only suggested change is to reduce the minimum size of the eligible area. The general public will be better served by improved management of the forest, the land and the water resource, whether the problem stems from beetles or wild fires and as we are painfully aware, one often follows the other.

I therefore urge this review to recommend that the federal government mountain pine beetle program be modified without delay, both in the scope

and in the funding to include private forest land owners who suffered serious losses due to the wild fires.

Thank you for this opportunity.

GF Thank you very much, Mr. MacNamara. Technically the federal government is outside of the mandate of the terms of reference that I have been given, but as I have indicated in other meetings where there are practical and reasonable recommendations to be made, we will certainly be making them and it will be up to the relevant government to look at them and see whether or not they make sense.

Have you by any chance approached anybody in the federal side about this? You know, pointing out the parallels that you have?

PM Yes I have, informally, and for one reason was to advise them I was doing this. I didn't want them to be caught by surprise. Nobody likes surprises. There was no real comment.

GF No comment?

PM No comment – but it was informal.

GF Well there is a lot of sensible information and certainly from a forest management standpoint a lot of concerns that need to be addressed as were pointed out in yesterday's presentation and you have reinforced today with a lot of the information. Thank you for sharing all of that and we appreciate having your expertise on this.

PM Thank you very much.

Next we have Dr. George Scotter – is he here?

Dr. George Scotter:

I would like to thank you for the opportunity for me to spend a few minutes here. I would like to start off by giving you just a brief background. As a student in university I had the opportunity to work in Idaho on both wild fires and on prescribed burns. After graduation I studied fire ecology in Northern Manitoba, Northern Saskatchewan and several places in the Northwest Territories. I published a great number of papers including one with Dr. Stan Rowe from the University of Saskatchewan which is probably the most frequently cited paper on fire ecology and the boreal forest. Following that, I was responsible for introducing prescribed burns to national parks in Alberta and in Saskatchewan, a program that has expanded in prominence in recent years. I mention this only in hopes that it might add credence to what I am about to say.

I have very mixed emotions about being here today. I live on Okaview Road, one of the most hard-hit areas during the fire and I have a home today only because of the efforts of some unknown fire fighters. From personal experience I know this is a dangerous, hot, smoky and very demanding job. And I think the evacuation and the communications were extremely well done, and the outpouring of the community was just beyond what anyone could hope for.

But the real question is if the heroism of the fire fighters and all these other activities that were so well done were really necessary. I think not. If the fire had been properly managed in the beginning there would not have been any need for all these heroics and all these extra efforts. I was taught that the initial attack on a fire should be fast and aggressive. It seems that on this one the attack was slow and anemic. I would like to remind the panel that it is less than ten minutes by helicopter from the closest helicopter base to the location of the fire. I would also like to remind the panel that the British Columbia Forest Services made a great thing out of the fact that we had a drought, we had high heat and we had a build-up of debris in that particular area. All the more reason that the attack should have been much more aggressive, much better planned, and much better manned. There are rumours that on the first evening of the fire that there were no crews assigned to the fire. I think that is an important question to ask, it is important to know why there was no one assigned to that fire. In addition, initially the fire was in the grasslands, which should have been very easy to control.

Since the fire was near a major centre of population why were the Mars Water Bombers owned by Timber West not called in immediately? A very important question. The extensive use of the water bombers later on the fire is a tacit admission that the B.C. Forest Service decision in the first case was seriously flawed. In other words, those water bombers should have been here on day one.

It would seem that spending a few dollars at the first – at the initiation of the fire could have saved millions of dollars later on and untold suffering by many.

I have many questions about how the fire was managed on the Friday when more than 200 houses were destroyed. On the previous evening on Thursday, fire guards were extended to the Belcarra Estates region and that area was protected. Why were fire guards not extended from Cedar Creek south early on Friday morning? From first light until the firestorm in the late afternoon there should have been ample time to extend the fire guard to be half a kilometer wide and twenty kilometers long around the periphery of the property that needed to be protected. Combining the fire guard with some back fires, in other words using fire to fight fire, should have protected our communities.

When the panel meets with the B.C. Forest Service I think you must demand to know when and how equipment and manpower were dispatched. Was it a case of the fire administrators fiddling while Okaview and Crawford Estates were being prepared to burn? Don't let the B.C. Forest Service tell you how steep and inaccessible the area is. I am over seventy years old and I walk the area several times every week and I could cover the area where fire guards were needed without a puff break.

... (tape over) ...

fire guard and backfires to protect our communities.

I would also like to point out that we have two parks in the area with large gravel parking lots. We have lawns, grassland – we have two large vineyards, one of which – Cedar Creek Winery – were able to protect their own operation through the use of their equipment. It is beyond believe that the B.C. Forest Service with all the equipment and manpower they have couldn't do a similar job for our community.

There are also some interesting comments that have been made on fire guards that were established near Crawford Estate. I am told that there was a great debate on where the fire guards should be located, whether the fire guard that was being built was directing the fire into the community or protecting it. I understand the debate was so vigorous that there were fisticuffs on the fire line. Certainly not something we need when we are trying to protect human lives and property.

It leads to the question of who was in charge. And was there any all over plan. Did they by not attacking the fire aggressively initially – I think they were just overwhelmed and didn't know what to do.

I have only one conclusion and that is that the early management of the fire was grossly inadequate. I trust that that will be adequately addressed in the panel's report. I think that in dealing with the B.C. Forest Service, and I understand you are going to have the opportunity to ask them questions, that

they will come out and tell the truth – let us try to prevent this tragedy from happening in another community, and just not cover their tail feathers.

I thank you for your time. I hope the comments will be of some value to you.

GF Thank you Dr. Scotter. I appreciate your comments and the questions that you have asked are ones that we will be pursuing. I have every intention of being able to give an opportunity to the various others who have been involved with this, whether it's the Forestry Service or municipal fire fighting people to have an opportunity to respond and that will then result in whatever conclusions we draw for the report.

GS Thank you.

Is Louis Thibodeau here? Welcome.

Louis Thibodeau:

Welcome Mr. Filmon and members of the review panel. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this committee on the recent and past fires in the Okanagan. As a member of the Kelowna Power and Sails Squadron – and I would like this noted – I am not speaking on their behalf today. I left the squadron approximately five years ago, but as I retired from boating. As a member our goal at that time was to teach safe boating. One of the services we provided at the time was to patrol the lake for various events such as ski to sea, the lake swim, hydro plane racing, fire works, antique boat shows, the Snowbirds performance, and the Dragon Boat races. We worked with the police and coastguard on some of these events.

When I started with the Power Squadron there was a fire on Knox Mountain that was arson. The fire started approximately 5:30 p.m. near Paul's Tomb, and reach Magic Estates at Clifton Road in about twenty minutes. The Kelowna fire department was about to change shifts and this brought both shifts and their efforts saved all the homes in Magic Estates and the homes on Clifton Road, ours included. We had help from the Forest Ministry with helicopters and planes putting down fire retardant and water.

The point I would like to bring up is the planes and helicopters getting water from Okanagan Lake for the Knox Mountain Fire, the Fintry Fire and the Okanagan Mountain fires being hampered by inconsiderate boaters and personal water craft. This has been going on for a number of years and it still continues to this day. As a member of the Power Squadron at the time of the Knox Mountain fire I asked after the fire if there was any way we could help to keep boaters away from emergency areas. I was told at the time by the fire department that it was a federal water way and we had no authority to help in this manner. In both instances there were complaints from pilots, the police and the fire department regarding the lack of consideration from boaters and personal water craft users for the safety of the pilots assisting in putting out these fires.

It appears we have very little or not patrolling of this lake at times to control these boaters. I would like to suggest that in emergencies such as stated above that the job of patrolling the lake be given to responsible organizations or to individuals that might help the police or any other organization such as the Coast Guard to do this job.

I thank you for your time.

GF Thank you very much Mr. Thibodeau. This is an issue that hasn't been brought forward, but certainly makes a lot of sense. Having flown in a water bomber myself I know that it is a very, very delicate and risky situation that those pilots are in and it didn't occur to me that people wouldn't be cleared out from the area when they are filling their tanks. So this is a good point that you have raised and we will try and find a solution to it.

LT Thank you very much Mr. Filmon.

And now we have Doreen Kaiser. Is Doreen here? If not we will put that aside for the moment and ask for Peter Campbell.

Peter Campbell:

Thank you for allowing me to speak. I am a resident of Kelowna for the last eight years, retired for some thirteen years, with lots of time on my hands. Saturday at noon, August 16th I decided to drive to Peachland and have a look at the lightening strike. There was a lightening strike at my daughter's house that same morning at 3:30 that put a tree out of commission in the front yard. I wanted to see what the results were. As I arrived at 12:00 o'clock, all I saw was just a puff of smoke coming over Squaley Point. And I thought a waste of time. I decided to stay and I went to Antler's beach and just decided to watch it. At 12:30 the smoke increased. At 1:00 o'clock I could see flames under the smoke. At 1:30 the fire was starting to really move. The lake was starting to whitecap. At 2:00 o'clock, I was flabbergasted. 1500 feet in the air was a cloud of smoke and the fire jumped over Squaley Point and headed to Kelowna.

My comments at that time to my wife as recorded – this little fire has turned into a monster out of control. There is no power on earth that is going to stop this holocaust from reach Kelowna and I hoped my prediction was wrong.

I monitored the fire for the next seven weeks, day and night. I took over 175 pictures. I came here yesterday to listen and learn. I was having a little trouble with some of the comments made because the homework wasn't done.

It was – I heard rumours – I think – somebody told me – and it just started to make the back of my neck crawl a little bit, I must say. The fire hit at 2:05 across the Little Acres Fruit Stand – we all know that. The lady phoned it in and the recording at 911 was given at that time. George Green and his neighbour from the same area across the lake from the fire also called in the fire. Kevin Matuga received a call at 2:25, that's recorded. The first airplane on site was at 5:15 in the morning. That was a chopper. That chopper started to bomb the fire immediately and called for assistance. The fire at that time from the report of the Peachland fire department that was on site at 4:00 in the morning said the fire was the size of a football field. This is unheard of in a two hour situation in the middle of the night. Very, very seldom – I did my research, no fire grew that big that fast in the middle of the night. The local Peachland fire department's job was to notify the tourists on the beach that the fire was there, to be prepared to leave. There were people who had horses up in the bush, they were on horseback and they had to be contacted. They were contacted, their lives were saved. They ferried over with their zodiac three loads of fire fighters – that's fifteen that went over early in the morning. The other group ferried over at least two and up to three other groups of fire fighters. We had 30 fire fighters on the ground.

The water bombers – helicopters had put in excess of a million gallons of water and fire retardant on that fire before 11 to 11:30 in the morning. Now that's a fast attack. There was something that happened that was really strange. The fire went down – all we could see, and I have the pictures to

prove it – was just a puff of smoke. And I was disappointed – I came to see a fire. The thing that happened was when I talked to the fire people that were at the beach, that were there – I have pictures of them, I talked with them. They went across the lake – I spoke to them after and I said why did the fire start again? And they said it was very simple – the density of the underbrush. The fire was put out on the top but not underneath. It looked like the fire was out. The wind was not blowing. There was no danger. They were able to handle what appeared to be a mop-up. And that's what it appeared to be. There were good decisions made. The wind picked up between 12 and 2:00 and that's what started this holocaust.

For the other people who made comments previously they said they could see this and they could see that across the lake – I beg to differ – I could not see – and I was across the lake. All I could see was through my 200 focused lenses that gave me the pictures that told me what was going on. So I had to look through the eyes of the fire fighters and the people that were directly involved. This one picture I would like to leave with you. This is 2:00 o'clock on this side of Squaley Point heading to Kelowna. The fire department from Peachland had to go on emergency and evacuate all the people that were north of Squaley Point. They saved quite a few lives at that time. The fire was chasing them off the beaches. So that's the extent of what happened.

The situation – there are lots of things that happened after that that were uncontrollable. The Tuesday night the fire went up to Kelowna. The wind came Tuesday morning at 6:00 and pushed the fire back up the mountain and the fire stayed on the mountain 'til Thursday night. There was a steam cloud that formed over Okanagan Mountain and there was approximately 20,000 hectares burning at that time. Even the fire department did not expect that fire to come down off that mountain.

On Friday the fire came down because of the 60 and 70 kilometer winds. I cannot see how anybody could have done anything different than what they did. When the wind came that was a holocaust that nobody could stop. There wasn't any power that could stop that. The steam cloud that formed over the mountain when the fire came through the steam cloud followed and at 10:00 Friday night there was a lightening storm, the rain started, and basically put the fire out. And the fire then, the next morning, went up underneath and went up to the Canyon and up to the railroad.

Now what happened in between we have all heard? So I would say that unless the people know what they are talking about, how the fire started and how it was handled, they get their facts straight. And that's all I have to say.

GF Thank you very much Mr. Campbell.

Now, I will ask again if Doreen Kaiser is back in the room. Not – so the next speaker we have is Mr. Glen Maddess? Then we will see if Mr. Chris Blaine is here? Okay, Mr. Geoffrey Paynter? Welcome. Hi!

Geoffrey Paynter:

I saw you at noon, I was just going to submit it as an envelope, but I thought I would come and listen and then decided to speak. Thank you very much for hearing me.

We all know the fire started early Saturday morning. I went down on my sea-doo and actually tied up to the houseboat that reported the fire. We were well out of the way of the water bombers at the time. That was around 10:30. We watched and about 11:30 a.m. that morning the three planes that were fighting the fire headed west not to return until the usual afternoon winds picked up at Squaley Point. And I think it was around 4:00 o'clock that they returned, but I am not positive on that – but it was well after the fire was humming along.

My number one question is who made the call to stop the water bombers at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday August 16th.

The second point, the regional area has a fire rescue boat that could have been used to fight the fire along the shoreline, leaving a green strip all the way along as the tail of the fire, for the most part, dragged or followed behind the fire at the shoreline. So if we were looking at Squaley Point the fire just came along like that – this is the lake – I went out there on Sunday on a boat and there was a few helicopters working, no water bombers on Sunday and I was just wondering why this boat which has a water pump on it wasn't used at the start of the fire to at least leave a green strip to help the erosion along the shoreline.

The fire lay down on Sunday, August 17th in the afternoon and early Monday morning, August 18th. The fire was only fought by helicopter Sunday until late Monday afternoon when they started to put the retardant down near the white houses. There was a good opportunity to create some good guards at that point and do some back burning, but none was done. I was really surprised to see that the white home – no equipment was there – the fire took two days to get there and there were no trees cut down, no guard put up around the big white homes at the end of the road.

Every logging contractor in the bush is required to have fire fighting equipment on hand and these contractors have local knowledge and could have created some guards and done some back burning on those days. All the locals know that just about every afternoon in the summer a good breeze comes up from Squaley Point headed for Kelowna and you only have to ask the unlimited hydroplane operators and the organizers, because they couldn't run in the afternoon usually because the wind had picked up so greatly.

Question three: why was there no large scale logging done in the days that preceded the Thursday and Friday fires along with back burning. I feel that they had four days to do that in.

The next statement I have is really second hand – I have talked to people that were there, but I was not personally there. It is my understanding that the experts were brought in from outside the area and were not familiar with the area and local wind conditions. Equipment operators were not given orders until after 10:00 a.m. each morning. From my own personal fire experience, fires need to be fought early in the morning – from my point of view just before sunrise, and not just before noon. Why were the orders not given earlier in the day?

My son was on a tender truck hauling water to the fire trucks in the Crawford area Friday night. He says the term ‘hero’ was well deserved for those guys on the line of fire. I guess I’ll say the pun was intended – but he thought he was hauling – actually it was because the fire hydrants had gone dry and they were hauling water to each fire truck, giving each fire truck 1,000 gallons.

In summary I feel that the local people, fire fighters, loggers and contractors were not used properly. In short the experts did not know the local wind conditions and were not familiar with the lay of the land. When the fire jumped Wildhorse Canyon we had four days to create larger guards. I am talking at over 1,000 feet wide and actually remove the logs and debris around these residential areas. Someone somewhere made a call not to fight the fire in the park aggressively.

Thank you.

GF Thank you very much Mr. Painter and again the questions that you have asked are ones that are very similar to others that have been asked and so we will try and find the answers to that for you.

GP Thank you.

Is Dale Middlemiss here? Okay, we will go through the list again in case some people have shown up. Doreen Kaiser – please come forward.

Doreen Kaiser – please come forward. Welcome.

Doreen Kaiser:

I'm coming!

GF We're glad you are.

DK Gee I hardly got my stomach organized. I am Doreen Kaiser. I live in Westbank. I am here today to speak because of concern about the first response to the Okanagan Mountain Park fire.

My husband and I were on our way to Penticton on Saturday, August 16th. We stopped about noon at Antlers Beach, south of Peachland to view the fire and water bombers we thought were working. At that time all we could see was smoke coming from a small area across the lake. It was then we noticed fire fighters gathering on the beach, obviously waiting for something. Coming from a fire fighter background, I was naturally curious so I went over to speak to them. My first question was – as experienced fire fighters how would they classify this fire. Their responses somewhat surprised me. Statements like no concern, no big deal, just a park, no houses – I then asked where the water bombers were. And they said they had been called off because this was a mop-up and the fire should be under control soon. One fire fighter said retardant had been dropped and the fire shouldn't move any further.

About this time a boat came from across the lake. It looked like a police boat and was manned by someone in a uniform. Could have been Coast Guard or RCMP – five fire fighters with only axes and shovels got on, and off it went across to the fire. I asked why only five when obviously there was room for more. Maybe ten, twelve – I was told there were only five lifejackets on board.

We timed the boat's round trip – it took 45 minutes. I would have thought that time was important in getting people over to the fire and that surely more life jackets could have been brought, or more boats called into service. By now there were 20 or 25 fire fighters waiting. Just think of the time that it took to get a team over to that fire. We continued watching the activity and the fire until nearly 2:00 p.m. I remember remarking that I was glad the lake was so calm and there was no wind to whip up the flames. I heard later that the wind came up at noon, but I don't think that's true. I did not leave that beach that day with any air of confidence that everything was being done that could be done. At the fire site, the terrain is rugged and heavy equipment could not be used, so only aerial support would help – but none was visible the whole time we were there.

Returning home about 10:00 p.m. that evening, my worst fears came true. The wind had come up, the fire had exploded and the mountain was ablaze.

Now the reason I am here. That blasé attitude that first day has been gnawing at me ever since. That more could and should have been done that day to knock that fire down quickly. The fact that a fire is in a park, fairly isolated

with no homes in immediate danger doesn't matter. Because when Mother Nature decides to step in nothing apparently can be done. The fire started small and it should have been stopped small. And all the grief and anguish and trauma and hardship to man and beast and all the financial loss to everyone could have been avoided.

Knowing that Mars bombers were sitting idly because there might be a fire on the Island when the valley was experiencing an inferno absolutely sickens me. Having seen what I saw, heard what was said, and experienced what we all did here in this valley, I beg you in your recommendations to put strong emphasis on the first response to fires that have the potential to cause so much heartache. I do not want to spend every summer paranoid about every puff of smoke from a fire that might eventually burn my home.

I thank you for listening to me today.

May I speak off my paper for a minute, please?

GF Absolutely, sure.

DK Is there a question that you wanted to ask me?

GF No, go ahead, we will after.

DK I realize that manpower and equipment that day was hard to get into that fire, but primarily it was the attitude that was bothering me. It seemed like nobody gave a hoot. No one — no one could have foreseen the severity of that fire — no one. And that is exactly my point. No one could have foreseen what was going to happen and that's why I am here. Please! Try to change the attitude of the people in command. That when a fire starts please fight it with all your might. My father was a city fireman in the city of Calgary for 35 years and he always told me that the first five minutes was the most important five minutes of any fire. And he was a wise man.

Thank you. I have a copy of my submission here for you.

GF I would like a copy please. Thank you very much, Doreen. Thank you for coming. I will do my best.

I have gone through a number of names, now some of you may have been out of the room so I will just run through the list again of people who have indicated a desire and registered to speak. But they were running a little bit early and so it may be that they are not here yet.

We will begin with Glen Maddess – is Glen Maddess here?

Dale Middlemiss – please come forward. Welcome.

Dale Middlemiss:

My biggest concern was about the security and how everything was handled. We were on alert to evacuate so we took some stuff out and they wouldn't let us back in to get more out so I ended up going to work and the next morning I went around the long way from Penticton back through, and got back in there. I am from the Idabel area. The only security I met at that particular time was the guy at the racetrack up there, the Penticton Inn – that was nothing to do with the fire. I got back into my place and so – anyhow here's what I figure should be happening here – for those people who live out of the fire protection some sort of pass that they can come and go to help protect their place and protect our interests.

This is the story – we took some stuff out but couldn't get back in to get more – we were just on alert. So we had to go back and go in the long way. So we weren't even evacuated – we were just on alert and we couldn't get back in through Highway 33.

So we had to go back in the long way – there was no security there. In the future it would be a help to us up there – like we are a small community up there – if we had some more fire fighting equipment. I have my own system and that and there are a few pumps up there, but it would be nice in that situation that if we had Forestry pumps available, because people want to stay and fight. But anyway, here we go – to be able to have pumps and hoses to put up a fire line. We have the people needed to help.

The one fire that was started in 2002, my wife got all the people that were there at the time and got the fire out before the Forestry from Penticton got there. We do have some fire equipment. That was in 2002 that the fire started there. She took my pump system and the barrels – we had barrels – we had an ATV convention up there and I put water barrels all over where the campers were and I had those barrels. So she used those barrels to transport water by the trucks up the hill in order to get the fire out. So there is experience up there how to handle fires.

Security – we were told that our houses and life insurance would be void by the police – this is our insurance policies – if we stayed. Now I don't know if that is true or not, but as far as I am concerned they will never get me out of there again on an alert – even an evacuation – I won't leave anymore if this kind of system is going to be in place.

We got back in the other way and no patrol did our home. We patrolled our own subdivision up there by ourselves. We caught one truck that was not from there – I told my wife to go after him but she couldn't catch him, he was gone. Okay so he was up there for no good, I guess.

We should have the right to stay and protect our place and keep our sprinklers going and the hoses ready for the fire. If we cannot stay up there,

then the government should be responsible for all the uninsured stuff that is lost. Myself, I have a system in place 1-1/2" lines and a hose and sprinklers and two pumps with all the water needed – for it to work I need to be there. When I was evacuated up there I was told to leave it go, but geez I'd have more water damage than you could shake a stick at because it really rains up there when I put the sprinklers on. And the people up there, the cop and that they only saw half the system going. I mean I have another system going to flood the walls, the whole works, if we need to, if the fire gets that bad. But I can't leave that running if I'm not there, you see.

Anyway, the forestry people when they arrived there after that one evacuation I guess they were quite impressed so he got hold of his boss and his boss got hold of Brian Kemp and Brian Kemp came up there and spent about 1-1/2 hours up there with us. He was really impressed with the system I have in place. He took pictures and all that kind of stuff. You can probably see the pictures because his secretary, whatever it was, was taking the pictures there.

So – I don't know – I just think the system for people who are living on the outskirts who don't have any fire protection, they should have the right to stay behind and defend their property or protect their property. Because, when I was evacuated there – we left at I think it was six o'clock, the cop gave us an hour's notice or whatever and they lifted the evacuation at seven o'clock in the morning and I had no problem getting through the highway, but there was a police at the Idabel turnoff there on the pavement, he wasn't going to let me in – he said I have to turn you around. He said what are you going to do? I said I am going to turn my sprinkler on. But you know he had me so mad – I was impaired mad – like I never thought it would get to that situation but I was – and I was just going to tell that guy – I know what's wrong with you, you little s.o.b. – that's exactly the way I thought. You are on top of your ————— and your g.d. radio don't work – come over to my place and use the phone and you'll find out I'm allowed in there. That's the kind of stuff that took place.

So anyhow I spoke my mind, maybe I'll be free of this now but I don't think you will ever see me leave again, under any situation. You know, if the firestorm came that – I've got tremendous water, the other people up there – there are roughly eight pumps up there altogether – I was looking after another guy's place running the sprinklers up there while he was working in Salmon Arm with the helicopters – you know, he was fighting the fire – so I was making sure his place wasn't wasting down. Brian Kemp and Luke, that guy there, when he walked out into the pond – you see I had my whole system all in place – I have one pond in front of my place and if that ran dry which it did – was running dry – I'd pump water from another pond into that. I had that whole system going. And when I got there in the morning, the Forestry was just looking for a place to put it. But now, we were evacuated that night at six o'clock – just in case the fire came – there wasn't going to be anybody there to protect anything. Right? So anyway they hooked into my system and I helped them, I got permission for them to stay there as long as they were

there again if there was an evacuation again because I helped them put the sprinklers through the forest and all that, and I showed them how my system worked so they stuck their pump in the one place and over at the pump I had a big O pipe- strung all the way across the margin – that makes a tremendous creek by the way – and I transferred the water into my pond and – we were ready. We were going to take it head on. I even had my aluminum boat turned over by the pond. If I had to, I was going under that. My whole final escape – I had to go do it, it was going to be there – I wasn't going to leave. But, when they said the life insurance and all this kind of stuff then that made me think differently. Now I don't know if that was b.s. or not, but I heard it was b.s. – If you don't mind the language, I don't know. But I know I am getting in touch with my insurance companies and I am going to find out for future if that is what it is really like.

But anyhow, we were sitting up – the fire stop was about 3-1/2 kilometers from our place, we were in the McCullough area in – the Idabel Lake area, I guess. But we were actually in the Kootenays – in the Kootenay Boundary. The people didn't even know, I guess, what was going on there, I don't know.

My wife – this other letter is one my wife put together and I will just give it to you and you can do whatever you want with it. I was very unhappy and especially at the long way around – all the way around – but we could get in. So when we left on the Sunday when finally we were evacuated for good they had the policemen there and we told them — cedar?) Roofs in there – see they don't even know the roofs – how to protect because they're not using local people. I mean they should use local people in the area so they know, okay? Just like that pond there – the forest fire guy he was worried about running out of water – so I told him, we are roughly about three feet higher than the lake, because there is a beaver dam down there so if you're worried about running water – just pump over the beaver dam and you've got lots of water. See, those kinds of things. I was helping the Forestry out – I even made a – they were putting sprinklers on the roof, the hose cut off at the end of the roof, so I went home and made a plastic thing for them to mould the plastic things so they could stick them into the eaves of the house – the hose could go through there and it wouldn't pinch out the water going up. It's all those kinds of things.

We are local people up there and we know and there's people that will stay there and fight fire. We feel more secure if we're there fighting it than strangers that don't really give a damn. And that's what seemed to happen here. We had – I work down the riverside – I'm a fire watch down there by the way, and I make sure the place – when I leave, it's safe to leave and this kind of stuff. When we were walking up the stair that one morning I told the wife, I said I don't like the situation, because I remember the situation in Squamish in the 50's, what the atmosphere was like – and then we went to work – 9 o'clock that mountain was on fire and you could see the little cloud up there – a little cloud of smoke above it. Nothing was happening. That fire was

reported as far as I understand @ 2:30, 3:00 o'clock in the morning. Anyway, they had a fire over here at the log yard, where I work, Riverside Log Yard, over there and that is how a fire is supposed to be fought. When a fire gets started you hit it and get it out right now, you don't play around and wait with it because it's too damn late then. I think you see the results of it – this whole place. And as I understand this wasn't the only fire that had that same kind of situation. I happen to know a guy – the one that was down in Osoyoos there – I know the guy that actually jumped the fence to try and put that one out before it got any bigger at all.

Anyway – that's about it. I'll give you this note here – I spoke my mind, I'll maybe feel better now.

GF Thank you very much, Dale.

Do we have Chris Turton(?) here please?

Chris Turton(?)

I was born here and our family has been here for about a hundred years. If you think about the north slope of Okanagan Mountain, let's assume that's been here for five million years and has burned every fifty years – that would put about a hundred thousand fires that have happened on this mountain and that's the long term history and the short term history – most of that mountain was logged by horses and small equipment and all those access roads were there and the Kettle Valley Railroad construction was serviced with roads that crossed that mountainside, and the Wild Horse Canyon East Side Road was built in the '20s. All of those roads were kept open traditionally until a group that called themselves the friends of the south slope, whose properties were contiguous to the park and they had self-interest in preserving that park for their own recreational area ceased the roads to be open because there were no vehicles to keep them open. Therefore when it came time to fight a fire, it was absolutely inevitable because a mature tree either becomes lumber or it becomes fuel, and what we have to do is get back to allowing more people to access that mountain. With friends like the friends of south slope, the mountain doesn't need a lot of enemies because there isn't room for them. And what we have to do is get some controlled logging on that mountainside again. If people are offended by people cutting down trees, what you might do is take the mountainside and break it down into, say four sections, or four individual units, so you steal some technology from, say, Germany where they have this very small independently driven hydraulic motor type equipment with a small crane on one end and a chipper on the other, and the loggers are given the job of taking the mature trees out as a mature and their obligation and job would be to maintain their access roads and keep them open. The next level of people, as they move to say section B, the next people to utilize their tractors and access roads would be, say, the all terrain vehicle and motorcycle people. We are always looking for places for young people to access. Their accesses to the bush have been closed off pretty well totally now, but that's a totally different problem. But mind, you, the two run together.

So as the loggers move from section A to section B over a period of, say, six months and then on to C and D, etc., you might have the next level of people utilizing these road and trails be the people on bicycles. So maybe they are on section A year and a half after it was selectively logged. Then the loggers might be on section, say, D, which mean that the section before that – C – would be for the motorcycles and ATVs, Section B would now be for the people on bicycles and section A which is now a year and a half from when it was last logged, would be the people that want to walk their dog or ride their horse. But, by utilizing that hillside a little bit more astutely ...

(Tape 2 of 4)

... the whole thing is self-sustaining and we might set an example for the other parks in British Columbia that are just sitting waiting to catch fire. This fire was no surprise to anyone who had ever spent any time up on that hillside. It was just a case of when – it wasn't if.

Thank you very much.

GF Thank you very much. So, Chris, you are proposing that the Parks' rules and regulations be a little less restrictive and that some forest management practices that do involve selective logging and controlled burning being permitted within the parks – is that the main thrust of what you are saying?

CT Yes, and I am saying we don't have to reinvent the wheel. I have had an occasion to go into Germany and look at how they log there – and I am definitely not proposing this for all of British Columbia, but if you take that technology and you apply it to select hillsides which can either be an inevitable forest fire or can be some logical and well thought out harvesting. The two are compatible. You can take that north slope of the Okanagan Mountain and make it available to the total population including the husbanding logger and everybody's purposes are served. And it isn't a burden on the taxpayers. With a little bit of ingenuity and a little bit of intelligent traveling and doing some observations, we can parachute that technology into here.

By the way I worked for twenty-two days on the fire and at great personal expense. I did \$3200 damage to my equipment and got \$2400 for utilizing it in the fire and I got nothing for my 22 days at 12 hours a day. And, for the first 18 of those 22 days by the way, everything went really well and we did an incredible job. I worked up on the east side, above June Springs under Red Persudo(?), and he was an incredible man to cut through the red tape and to make things happen – I wasn't going to get into that. But there were an awful lot of sacrifices made by some very good people and as I was saying, for 18 days we did remarkable things. And then bureaucracy hit.

One of the things they insisted I do – I had to wear a hard hat that had a mouth piece in front of it and the hard hat had these ear muffs on it so when everything we were doing is radio controlled, well you can neither hear the radio, nor speak into it because the hard hat had this mouthpiece in front. And then it got to be a case of – well you weren't allowed to be – and I was a scout – I was the fellow that was out there trying to find where the fire was going next and try to steer the crews and keep them fed, keep them in fresh water and with food – and to always make sure they had a back door and a safety to get away in case we misread the direction of the fire. As long as we had freedom of movement it worked very well but the last four days were a disaster.

There were more blue uniformed people from Workers' Compensation who you had no idea what they were going to do next – they were totally unpredictable. They didn't contribute anything and they didn't know the mountainside. It was very chaotic – after the 18 days of free run that we had.

One of the little anecdotes – my son has some very heavy equipment along Crawford Road – he owns a gravel pit there – he strategically placed his equipment the night of the Crawford loss of the houses and he phoned his men at home – 9:30 at night to see if they would mind coming up and being available to run the equipment. There was an excavator, two loaders and a CAT and, when the police wouldn't let them through the fire line – or through the blockade – then my son went out to make sure his men could get through. As he left he said – Dad, keep an eye on the equipment and if it looks as though it is in jeopardy, you can move it for me – just while I am out. Well, he couldn't get back in either and at about 11:00 at night there was no one left in that total community, not a soul, other than myself and a Constable Heefley(?) and he came around and threatened to put me in jail and imprison me if I didn't leave. And I specifically said I hope you know how to run this equipment because if it is in jeopardy and you have run me out of here – and by the way there wasn't a person – not a chickadee nor a canary in that whole community – all you could hear were these roof sprinklers running and there was not a soul, not a fireman there when they finally ran me out at 11:00 at night. Fortunately the next morning my son had lost most of his gravel pit, but with all this equipment that he had strategically placed at the intersections – that didn't burn – but his gravel pit – some gravel trucks and some other equipment burned to the ground.

Anyway, thank you very much.

GF Thank you for coming, Chris.

GF I am wondering if George Heyman is here? Welcome.

George Heyman:

Good Afternoon. And thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation on behalf of the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union and our 58,000 members. We represent thousands of public workers, not only in the Ministry of Forests but also in the office of the Fire Commissioner, the Provincial Emergency Program, the Ministry of Human Resources, the B.C. Housing Commission, and other areas where public workers have official responsibilities to respond to emergency situations such as the wild fires that you are currently reviewing.

Our members took on significant roles in management coordination and administration in areas of fire suppression, evacuation, communications, command structure, volunteer coordination, emergency services, and general assistance.

In 2001 the Auditor General of B.C. submitted a comprehensive audit report entitled 'Managing Interface Fire Risks' I am sure you are aware of the highlights of that report and the 37 recommendations that flowed from the audit. In short, the Auditor General stated that while a serious wild fire hazard exists around communities of all sizes, in many high and moderate risk areas in B.C., the general public has only limited awareness of the problem. Wild fire prevention and mitigation measures need to be improved upon and implemented. Also, we need to improve our capabilities for response and recovery in the even of a major wild fire.

As noted in the Auditor General's January 2003 follow-up report, some of his original recommendations have been acted on, however most of his recommendations had only been partially implemented, or worse yet not followed at all. One of the Auditor General's key recommendations was to establishing a provincial interface fire committee involving the Ministry of Forests, the office of the Fire Commissioner and the Provincial Emergency Program to address and act on the recommendations identified in the report. That committee was appointed.

But let me quote from the Auditor General's follow-up report in January 2003 – no specific funding for the committee is currently available. Ability to fund committee activities by individual ministries is at present limited because of budget pressures. In reply to the 2001 recommendation to "mitigate interface fire risks" the provincial bodies responsible for managing interface fire risk noted that since it would require a commitment of significant funds by both the provincial government and local governments the committee will endeavour to complete the development of a framework discussion paper for consideration by government within the 2003/2004 fiscal year.

Important to note here is that the three provincial government entities with responsibilities for managing interface fire risks, either directly or in support of local governments do not have the resources or the staff to address or put

into practice in any meaningful way the findings of the Auditor General's 2001 report.

Since the Campbell government took office, staff in the Ministry of Forests have been decreased by 35%, budget cuts have also closed district offices and caused the layoff of many, many skilled and experienced workers. What many people call corporate memory. The number of provincial fire safety officers in the office of the Fire Commissioner were reduced from 27 to nine. Now this preceded the current government, it occurred in 1995.

Under the provincial emergency program's strategic objectives 2001/02, they highlighted funding and workload pressures that impeded prevented work on critical issues relating to provincial emergency programs. The director of the provincial emergency program made it clear to the standing committee on public accounts on December 12th, 2001 that due to his quotation "current resource levels" the expectations of the Auditor General's recommendations around wild fires may be beyond current program capabilities.

The wild fires of 2003 were caused either by lightning or by people, but it is generally accepted that the buildup of fuel at or near the ground level is what caused many of these fires to explode in the drought conditions that we experienced. Currently the Ministry of Forests does not budget for fuel reduction programs such as thinning and brushing; slashing, prescribed burns or harvesting saleable timber through partial cut treatments. Ministry staffing and budget cuts impede even the limited application of fuel reduction treatments.

We need, I believe, the provincial government to commit to a sustained and properly funded fuel management strategy. A fuel reduction treatment program using both mechanical methods and prescribed burning under the direction of qualified Ministry of Forests personnel would go a long way toward reducing the interface wild fire hazard. As an example, during the winter of 2002 Parks Canada partnered with the Ministry of Forests, the Radium Town Council and Slocan Forest Products to reduce fuel buildup and enhance the habitat for Rocky Mountain big horn sheep at a cost of about \$360,000. Revenue that was generated by the sale of logs paid for the project.

Our recommendation is that the Ministry of Forests immediately direct adequate resources to initiate the reduction of fuel in priority interface areas prior to the 2004 fire season and expand its current mandate to plan and budget for provincial wild fire prevention and mitigation programs that support the health of forests and habitat.

The Forest Protection Branch currently has 22 wild fire control unit crews of 20 members each and 112 three-person initial attack crews. These crews could be utilized for fuel treatment and prescribed burn programs with an

expanded mandate and additional funding that would carry them on through and beyond the fire season during which they are currently employed.

As well, the Protection Branch should be able to call upon the assistance and expertise of the many Ministry of Forest staff from district offices, timber sales and other departments as necessary. Many of these people before the creation of the Protection Branch were active during fire season, but since the establishment of the stand alone protection branch, they are effectively removed from the ability to contribute.

The levels of fire management experience and upgrade training across the Ministry of Forests have fallen since the responsibilities were centralized under the Protection Branch. District staff for the most part no longer receive any direct wild fire control experience, thereby robbing the province of the ability to call on in a state of emergency experienced and trained personnel who are right there and integrated into the Ministry's operations.

Our members in the districts have reported that they were either not utilized at all or were underutilized during the wild fire season just passed. One district office staff member stated and I quote "with my past fire fighting experience and being willing and able to fight fires it was very demeaning not to help out a little more. I was embarrassed that our district office was not helping out."

District office staff had in-depth knowledge of roads and the geography of the region. They know key people in industry and organizations and they should play a vital role in managing and coordinating fire management. Due, however, to massive budget cuts and staffing cuts, it now appears impossible for the Ministry of adequately manage and protect the interests of the Ministry and the people of British Columbia. Therefore we recommend that the exclusivity of wild fire management within the Protection Branch be reviewed with the understanding that it would be beneficial to expand wild fire management responsibility to district offices and other Ministry of Forests departments.

It would seem obvious the correct map data is the most essential tool for wild fire management; however our members have reported mapping deficiencies that may have hampered fire fighting efforts in 2003. Most of the Ministry of Forests mapping function was transferred to the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management some time after 2001. Unfortunately that Ministry has in turn chosen as its focus on staff reductions to lay off or declare redundant many of the workers who performed the mapping function, and therefore we recommend that adequate mapping capabilities be retained in the Ministry of Forests and mapping staff be trained and available for fire protection duties such as planning and fuel management.

I would like to comment that the Auditor General's independent mandate and authority under legislation offers protection for government employees when

responding to an audit. While I welcome the role that you are playing, and I question in no way the sincerity or the skill that you bring to this task, one of the reasons that the union had called for the Auditor General to this review was precisely that. Testimony from government employees must be encouraged to be open and forthright and they must be able to do that without fear of repercussion.

I sent a letter to Premier Campbell on October 22nd, formally requesting that he assure workers in the Ministry that as their employer, government would fully support them in speaking out in any matters to do with this inquiry and would not seek any reprisals against anyone for comments they may make.

I did receive a response from the Premier to the letter. He acknowledged receipt, but provided no assurances whatsoever that staff would be free from the threat of reprisal. It should be no surprise then, that public service workers are reluctant to provide detailed documentation about their concerns, although they have certainly fed many of their concerns into the union and they form part of this presentation.

Another issue of importance to us is the whole issue of succession planning. Many key experienced employees have left the Ministry of Forests and other ministries as a result of early retirement/voluntary departure programs that were part of downsizing. Many more will depart in the next few years as they reach retirement age. Many long term staff in the ministry fear for the future of the Ministry of Forests. They say that career planning, pathing and multi-level and cross-departmental training and experience is simply not occurring. The current policy of limiting wild fire control duties to the Protection Branch means staff from other departments in the Ministry are not gaining fire management knowledge and experience. For example, in the Protection Branch unit crews and initial attack crews are laid off at the end of the fire season because it is seasonal work – but we believe that if efforts were made to offer and expand their roles in prescribed burning, career related training programs, and other work opportunities in other departments of the ministry that the ability to meet it's mandate in an expanded fire prevention and mitigation mandate would be enhance – and in particular would provide a succession of information and corporate memory into the future. So we recommend that the Ministry of Forests make succession planning and wild fire management training programs a high priority to ensure effective staff levels for the future.

I would also like to briefly address the issue of health and safety. Our members have reported to us that some fire fighting crews were working 24 hours straight without sleep while battling the wild fires of 2003. While we acknowledge the severity and the emergent nature of the situation, this greatly exceeds the maximum one to three days of work at fourteen hours per day standard as set out in the ministry's own operational safe work standards. Working long hours beyond a maximum 14 day period without time off was a

far too common experience in 2003, but it was necessitated by understaffing. The Protection Branch does a good job of maintaining safe practices generally in difficult times, but the shortage of staff and the extraordinary circumstances really did push the limits of safety. Our members believe that it was sheer luck that fire fighters on the ground last summer escaped serious injury or loss of life. We therefore recommend that safety standards be reviewed in regard to continuous hours and days of work, and fatigue, and that such standards be enforced. Further, that staffing levels be adequate to meet demands rather than working existing staff beyond safe limits, and that the safety of fire fighting crews be investigated and that necessary directives be established.

My next comments have to do with the Provincial Emergency Program. Due to the demands of the 2003 wild fires our members who are employed at the Provincial Emergency Program or PEP reported tremendous workloads and the backlogging of their regular duties. There was therefore no time for them to catch up before the floods of October followed the wild fire season of the summer. Many report extreme stress levels on the job due to long hours and exhaustion and some believe that fatigue may have impacted their decision-making. In the Provincial Emergency Program Strategic Objectives 2001/2002 serious workload and funding problems were cited. They were cited as hampering the program's ability to meet its mandate. So we request and recommend that there be an audit of the Provincial Emergency Program by the provincial Auditor General to evaluate emergency preparedness for last season's wild fires and to review preparedness for other major disasters as well as upcoming fire seasons – in particular if occurring in a period when staff are already engaged to capacity. We further recommend that Ministry and Program budget levels and staff be increased to meet whatever recommendations are made by the audit.

The office of the Fire Commissioner's mandate includes working with and providing advice to local government on the delivery of fire protection services. The Auditor General's survey of local governments and his subsequent report in June 2001 highlighted the serious need for fire risk mitigation in high and moderate risk communities. The Auditor General's follow-up report of January 2003 stated that his original recommendation for mitigation action had only been partly implemented. As I stated earlier, the office of the Fire Commissioner lost 18 safety officers in 1995, leaving only nine. Their work is currently backlogged by about a year. If the office of the Fire Commissioner is to play a role in preventing and mitigating interface fire risk, we recommend that the provincial government increase the budget and staffing levels of the Office of the Fire Commissioner so that it can meet its mandate and obligations that were recommended in the Auditor General's report.

Let me finally make some comment on the Ministry of Transportation and the role Ministry budgets and funding of contractors play in removing fuels. It is

generally, as I stated, recognize that the dry grasses along highways and roadsides are fuel for wild fires that can be ignited by a tossed cigarette or a spark from a passing vehicle. Since 2001 and even earlier we have seen cuts to the budgets for road maintenance contractors that have reduced mowing frequency and in some areas now mowing was done in 2003 whatsoever. In past years removal of this latter fuel was done to the fence line – crews would chip, brush and haul it away. Now the cut is only to the dip shoulder and what is cut is left in the ditches. Across the province high grass and brush now commonly stretch from the roadside right up to the trees. So we recommend that the Ministry of Transportation budget for brush and grass removal from the roadside to the fence line and that maintenance contractors be required to remove the latter fuel as a preventative measure against wild fires.

In summary there is a quote from the provincial government's response to the Auditor General's follow-up performance report on managing interface fire risks and it says *"It must be acknowledged that the fiscal reality will continue to affect our ability to fully implement the recommendations. Implementation of expenditure and workforce reductions is scheduled to continue through to the end of fiscal year 2004/2005."*

If we look back over the 2003 season of wild fires and consider the fact that the Auditor General gave us a heads up in 2001 on the need for improved wild fire management, I think it is clear that the government needs to rethink some of its budget cutting priorities. A gamble appears to have been taken and unfortunately was lost. Staffing levels and budgets for services must be restored and in certain areas expanded in many areas to meet the demands for wild fire management and emergency preparedness. We don't believe that we can afford less.

I urge you to consider the recommendations in our presentation as part of your final report to the government and Premier Campbell.

I thank you very much for both the work you are doing and the opportunity to make a submission.

GF Thank you very much, George. If I can just ask a few questions about some of the things. I did read thoroughly the Auditor General's report and met with the three people from the AG's department who were responsible for producing the report. I believe of the 37 recommendations, fifteen or so have been done in totality, or satisfactorily to the AG. Is that your impression?

GH I can't confirm the number I think you are probably more familiar with it than I am but yes, I know that some of them have in fact been implemented, but a number have not.

GF I think there are only two that have not had any implementation at all. And then there are twenty that have had some degree of attention by virtue of this

committee that you referred to. It is my impression that in all cases the ones that have not been fulfilled involved another level of government. In other words, municipal or regional government implications – and in fact that a very significant part of them are in a situation in which the province can't impose its will because it is within municipal or regional jurisdiction. Is that your impression as well?

GH That partly fits with my impression. Certainly if there are other levels of government beyond the province I assume that you have the ability to make recommendations that go beyond what the province itself is capable of doing.

GF Yes, certainly in our case I would expect that we are also going to be making recommendations that may impact industry groupings, or even municipal regional authorities. So there is no question that the report is going to have to be addressed by whomever we address the recommendations to. They won't only be the provincial government; they may be to individuals in terms of self protection and other things as well.

I appreciate the comment you are making about going into areas such as parks where there is a need to selectively log or prescribed burn and a lot of the revenue can actually be generated by the process and can be a self-financing process. My impression is that there are vested interest stakeholder groups that want that to happen. Am I correct in that?

GH I think that certainly it would not be without controversy, but having watched a park essentially destroyed, I think it is – most people would believe that there is a balance that can be found.

GF Yes, in other words attitudes may have changed as a result of the terrible devastation of this summer.

I appreciate your comments about the employees not being given the assurance that they will not suffer reprisal for not coming here. I did have the opportunity to see the Premier make public assurances that this was a no holds barred review and that everyone was welcome to come before us. I am comforted to know that those who may still have some concerns about that have given their information to you, so I hope that in large measure covers your concerns. I am glad that you are here.

GH Well, we certainly had a lot of conversations with a lot of our members who work in not only the Ministry of Forests but other industries in preparing this submission. We took great care to check the information we had. We know how easy it is to turn anecdote into a statement of fact or a factoid and we don't believe that would be useful in this case.

GF I am concerned about people working twenty-four hours and I am concerned about nurses double-shifting and am concerned about anybody who works

under stress and in difficulty conditions for any period beyond normal working time. Is there no ability for people to just simply say I can't do this, or I need a rest? Are they under compulsion to work 24 hours?

GH Well, I think the compulsion in many ways is a bit of a self-enforced one. I think any of us in a situation like last summer, where houses and even lives and communities were threatened, wouldn't feel comfortable simply vacating if there wasn't somebody who could fill in for them. So it is just a difficult situation and one that while we can't avoid every difficult or dangerous situation, there is the ability to project and in certain situation in a fire season, we may put people in more jeopardy and under more threat than fighting fire already contains, and if there are measures that we can take to avoid that, I think that is incumbent on all of us to do that. I think if we were talking in this wild fire review about a number of people, or even one or two had lost their lives it would bring a new immediacy to the issue.

GF I think we all feel that we are blessed by the fact that no people were killed as a result of the fire, although tragically three pilots lost their lives in the process. There certainly were people in harm's way and I think it is a great credit to those who were in the end having to make difficult decisions that nobody was killed.

GH I know if I could just add to – I think this goes to some extent to the issue I raised about the creation of the Protection Branch and the separation of the Protection Branch from other functions and other staff in the Ministry and as I am a Ministry of Forests employee on leave for this job, and while my primary job in the ministry was not fire fighting, my experience 15 and 20 years ago was that we all received basic level training in fighting fire and we were all called upon when there was either a serious large fire or a number of small fires to leave other jobs that we were doing – that were our normal jobs – and bring the knowledge we had to assist in fire fighting and the ability of the ministry to utilize staff in that way I think went a long way to keeping other individuals from having to essentially be worked to the point of avoidable fatigue.

GF The topic of cross training has come up on a number of occasions at these hearings and I think there is a lot of merit in that.

Thank you very much.

GH Thank you.

Is Glen Maddess here? Would you come forward, Sir, please.? Welcome.

Glen Maddess:

My name is Glen Maddess and I have, in a former life, been involved in the fire service as a direct participator. I was a former Fire Chief in the City of Vancouver, an 850 member department. Since leaving that I have been in academic roles as an instructor of command and control, fire administration, and emergency management administration at eight different universities and colleges. So I truly do appreciate the format that this hearing has and inquiry and the ability that a resident of Kelowna, like myself has of coming forth and giving you information that we feel is pertinent to the situation.

I was not part of the fire response and therefore I will not comment on what exactly occurred, but as a preface to my comments I think it should be noted that in 1994 there was a serious fire in Penticton that was an interface fire, we lost 15 homes – 16 homes – 1998 you know about – Salmon Arm and the homes that were lost there and then of course we have had this year, the large number of homes. So it is a continuing problem we have had and maybe we need to start looking at things just a little bit differently than what we have been. I think you can learn the hard way, or you can learn maybe where there are some reasons or knowledge that is out there that we can take on.

I think the first issue that we should maybe take a look at is governance. How do we govern the handling of interface fires? Where do we put the different sections of government, provincial government, to be able to respond to these kinds of things?

Well, in the province of British Columbia the office of Fire Commissioner is in the Community, Aboriginal and Women's Service Ministry – the same Ministry that Culture, Heritage, Sport, Housing and Building, Policy, Immigration, Multi-Culturalism, Safety Engineering and Child Care. If the purpose of the office of the Fire Commissioner is that of legislation and overseeing and being part of building by-laws and building legislation, that is probably a pretty good place. But I would like to point out that a number of provinces in this country say that their chief fire official, their Fire Commissioner or Fire Marshall should be in a pro-active public safety ministry. We see Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick – the majority of Canadians as a matter of fact are covered in this kind of governance. And even more startling is if we look in the United States where some states have had a heck of a lot more experience – and I am talking about the State of California – of interface fires, of similar types of arrangements – their chief fire officials are in a ministry that delivers services in public emergencies. So I would put forth as a recommendation that the Fire Commissioner should be removed from its current Ministry to one that is more focused upon response to emergency situations and ministries worth of this consideration would be either Public Safety and Solicitor General or Ministry of Forests. Both of these governance oversight methods seem to work better elsewhere than ours in our current situation.

The second issue that I would like to talk about it is the management within the government and we understand that to be able to command and control these kinds of operations that occur when we have interface fires there are still steps that are necessary. I think we should examine the skill sets that the Fire Commissioner's office has to have for that position and see what they are in other areas and see if it would be appropriate for inclusion – and I think it probably is appropriate at the moment, because as I understand there has been some competitions for the vacancy position coming up of Fire Commissioner.

Both the states of California and Oregon have found this type of background of active fire service, coordination and leadership role is important for the consideration of those positions. They want to have people with operational fire fighting and command experience fulfilling their chief fire official role. The recommendation therefore is that job requirements for the position of Fire Commissioner should at the very least include operational fire service command experience. This will allow the office to work more effectively with the provinces fire services to better assist their training, legislative and operational needs; it will also better assist this office in having a leadership role with the fire province's industry.

The next issue I would like to talk about is standards and training and believe me I am not going through every one of these pages – but fairly recently, January 1, 2003, B.C. Fire Service Training Standards were replaced by NFPA training standards – an incredibly good move – absolutely necessary. But at the present moment what we have is a situation where the Ministry of Forests will see a need in a certain area so they will have a course they will put on for fire service at the local level. Provincial Emergency Program will see a need and we'd better get our course there because that's our mandate – we've got to make sure they're trained. And then the office of Fire Commissioner is going to need – and so we have a very fractured situation of training. It's not coordinated, there is no cohesion, and we did hear I think in a previous presentation of the committee that the Auditor General has implemented or had implemented. But I don't believe that goes far enough. I believe that you have to start taking a look at how have these things been done successfully elsewhere – particularly California North. California, they set up a state funded board composed of state officials in both forestry and fire, and for the most part appointees from the fire service and local government. That board oversees what the standards and training is for that state. The State Fire Marshall funds the State Training Centre, the board lays out areas that they feel need attention by courses and attention of training areas and in turn, focus groups are set up and training packages developed and put together for both the student and the instructor, together with an examination, that then goes to every person that has taken that course, whether it is a fire officer or a fire fighter course. The strength of that is the instructors, like myself, have to be evaluated and stated that yes; you are competent to deliver this course, or

this course. So you have a competency of instructors. You have common teaching and you have the ability of all to understand what is being told.

What is the advantage of that? It means when people are mobilized everybody talks the same language. Everybody understands the roles – everybody knows how they are going to work together – all levels, state and in this case province and local.

Mobilization of fire resources – there are some good plans, some good systems out there. How did they get to be good systems? They got there because they had a heck of a lot of local involvement. It wasn't just province involvement. It wasn't just state involvement. It was local involvement. Because it's a local deliverer that is actually going to be delivering the fire protection – whether it is Kelowna, Vancouver, Kamloops, or any other area – it's a local area that is primarily going to be the responder. So we've got to make sure that they understand how the system is going to work when they ask for assistance. And, to get that, they have to have input into the system. That system has to be well publicized and the examples I give are the two best practice states – they are – you want to find out what the mobilization process is for Oregon – go there – it's on the internet. Take a look. Every member that works in Oregon understands its – every chief who calls for resources knows how the system works – or is asked for resources knows how it works. We know what the costs of apparatus is; we know what the standards are for apparatus, or equipment – whether it be bulldozer or water tanker.

Briefly in addition to that I would like to just highlight a couple of different other areas. There is an increasing number of people that are moving into the interface areas. Some of them are in unorganized areas and we have regional districts in our province that allow this to happen and do not supply any type of fire resource. So in essence what happens is the general public has to pay for fire fighting in those areas, in those regional districts that do not have fire protection because when the interface situation occurs then we as a province and a citizen of the province have to pay for it. I believe that the need is for the regional districts to have some responsibility and that it be legislated for fire protection in those areas. And furthermore, we should establish minimum levels.

We also have situations where we have many volunteer fire departments. We have many that are societies, that aren't supported by anybody. It's hard for them to get equipment. This has happened in other areas too. New York State, for example, has a revolving fund. They put up a million dollars a year at 2.5% interest and fire departments draw on that fund. And, if you are in need of a particular piece of equipment, or want to upgrade your communications, there is that fund that is revolving every year. You have to pay it back – you have five to twenty years to do so at 2.5% interest – cheap protection.

We heard mention about the Auditor General's recommendations. I believe he did a yeoman job, absolutely first class in look at things from the province's perspective. The cautionary note that I would add is I do not believe that it was in his mandate to look at things from the local perspective and as such what I have tried to do in the remaining ...

(Tape over)

... some of them I have no comment, others I have. But it certainly is one huge first step of getting people focused to take a look within our province.

I would like to comment, though, on one of his recommendations – pardon me, two – the Ministry of Forests should work with local fire departments to address the concerns they have with Ministry of Forests operating guidelines and the Auditor General's comments that have been partially implemented through an ongoing liaison with local fire service. I don't believe that goes far enough and – this is on page 16, if you are looking at the submission – I think we have to look at more of the California example where we have a state board of fire services, or they have a state board of fire services composed of voting members of different facets of the industry, including the forest service, including the Fire Marshall, including the local fire service. It is only in that way that we are going to be able to get cohesion of guidelines and common direction, common understandings. On page 20 – training of fire fighters and other emergency responders – interface fire committees should work with communities to improve training of local fire fighters and other emergency responders with emphasis on high and moderate risk locations.

I touched briefly before, but examples given that there is an S205 training course, S100, S10A training course – I that is from the Forests – Provincial Emergency Program has another of IMS incident management courses. The Fire Commissioner has a number of fire prevention and investigation courses, and the JI (Justice Institute of B.C. Fire Safety Division) has a number of officer NFPA and fire fighter NFPA compliant courses. They haven't sat down and tried to mesh them. And we need to have some direction, some leadership to be able to do so. Sometimes you are learning different things in one course than the other, you are also not integrating and maybe all you need is a component of another course to get the point that you are trying to get from one. It's a needless waste of resources. That I think highlights the major areas. I do have a comment – I couldn't resist the opportunity, I guess – of a number of other areas and I am hopeful that you, in your time before going to bed will take a look at them – but I strongly believe that if we are going to move forward and address interface problems successfully we have to have a change of system. That change of system has to have less Ministry's involvement, but more local involvement at the fire service practitioner level.

I think when we do that we will learn from best practices that have done that elsewhere and will be more focused and able to handle things ourselves.

That's just some of the comments that I have.

GF Thank you very much, I appreciate all that you are saying. There have certainly been many resonant themes about training and cross training, preparedness. I mentioned to some that when I had my initial briefings from the Office of the Fire Commissioner, Ministry of Forests and Provincial Emergency Program that I came away from each of them with a book that thick and I am satisfied that there is a tremendous amount of knowledge and information out there – the difficulty is that using – and I guess one should never use himself as an example but the time that it would take for me to go through all of that wonderful material and if I were an individual looking to say what can I learn from this in terms of preparing my home for – you know – it's all there – and – but I don't think too many people ever get to read it and I'm not sure whether we can distill it down into, as somebody said yesterday, the kind of thing that is on the back of the seat in front of you in an aircraft that tells you what you have to do to get out of the plane if it crashes. You don't have time to read the manual. So those are the sorts of things that we are dealing with here and I think you are right in trying to say that at the very least where you have three or four different agencies all trying to do the same thing, we should be able to come up with a common course. That there should be as much cross training as possible so that people working in these emergency circumstances who have an involvement with fires – maybe all of them should be able to take some of the course core material and then have their own specialization on the side, that kind of thing. There is a lot to be said for that and we will certainly be going through much of that, Mr. Maddess, as we go through.

But thanks for making a comprehensive presentation for us. We will read it. So thank you for being here.

We have two, I think; I don't know why I am anticipating that they will be slightly longer, but two longer presentations to come up, one from the Wildlife Federation and one from the CBC. So I think I will take just a quick break. Please help yourself to a cup of coffee or use it for a biological break if you choose, but we will be back in ten minutes.

I will just say that the Wildlife Federation is here and we will after them have a very short presentation from a local resident who is unable to stay too long – Jennifer Banerjee but she will come after the Wildlife Federation and then we will have the CBC on behalf of the media.

So, if I may just welcome the representatives of the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

Wildlife Federation:

Thank you Mr. Filmon, we are prepared to postpone our presentation if the local resident would like to go ahead of us – if it would be more convenient for her, we can wait.

Okay, if that's all right, thank you. Good Afternoon.

Jennifer Banerjee

I haven't made much preparation for this so I will just go through it very quickly, but I think you should know about my situation.

At 23:15 hours on the 22nd of October, 2003 there was a tremendous thunder storm, lightening – the television went out and I decided to go to bed early. I looked out of the bedroom window and the Niagara Waterfalls was coming over my rockery, and the Mississippi River was swirling around my house. I thought it was all black water but it wasn't, it was mud. I went downstairs – I spent 30 years in Manitoba – you always went downstairs when there rain. And I went down and there was a trickle of black stuff coming down the corridor, the furnace was try, then suddenly there was one wave of mud and then there was another wave of mud and it just held me against the wall. I could have died if I had slipped and lost my footing. Mud flowed into the lower part of my house and it's a double decker house – it's built into the side of the hill. There was six feet of mud eventually when it desisted.

My house is fifty years old. It is really quite a remarkable house. It was built by a very famous Canadian – Ron Thom(?) – and I had thought at one time it should have been registered with local heritage people. It has a beautiful view from every window and it was built 50 years ago when the old Chute(?) Lake Road is now Lakeshore Place and my house is built well above the old Chute Lake Road.

This mudslide that I am talking about, it came down from the deforested burned area into the newly developed area, gathering momentum as it went and it came down Chute Lake Road, across Chute Lake Road, through my orchard and right through my house. I took the maximum damage from this mudslide – it went on to other houses, but mostly it didn't go inside.

The new Lakeshore Road should have been built with a certain angle on it I feel, as the road out to Vernon, I think the road tilts there and there were several accidents the other day and they all went into the mountainside of the house. Why my road is flat by me, I don't know – it's a very bad engineering construction and there are no berms protecting my neighbour's house or mine. The newest house, the third house up has got berms but that's a relatively new house.

My neighbour is a retired engineer. He checked the culverts three days – he always checks everything – he watches what everyone does – and he checked the culverts just three days before this happening and they were not clean, and some of them were block, and there is one that has been blocked every since I've been in the house which is five years. I think for about three weeks it took them to clear the culverts and rebuild them and then a week ago we had 26.6 mils of rain. Tremendously heavy rain last week and the culverts drained the whole area very adequately.

The new developments further up have endangered my house. And the culverts up in the new development, the diameter of them are larger than the culverts down by my house and I think that is contrary to normal practice.

Everyone referred me to PEP, which is the Provincial Emergency Program. It seems that no one here really knows what PEP is. PEP will consider your application up to a maximum of \$100,000 and if you qualify you have to pay the first \$1,000 and then after that you will get 80% of the remainder if you qualify. There are many things that don't qualify. It's only the things that they will pay out money for eventually if you do qualify – things like means to daily living – kind of – like a furnace, a hot water tank – they will insulate my outer walls and so on, but they will do nothing for rebuilding the inner walls. I have lost all my furnishings, all my books and they will look after the laundry room – that is the only room they are looking after in any part of my house is the laundry room. They won't look at the bathroom, there's a kitchenette there, there's a lounge with a beautiful grade one top, top Indian Carpet which was absolutely huge, and the other room was carpeted. They were all custom made drapes – everything is gone and Provincial Emergency Program will not look at any of those kinds of things. And the people seem to think that PEP is going to rescue me. They aren't. I am going to be in a mess for years to come. I just think that you should know that nothing was done.

I was told by the policeman who locked me in the car when this happened and I went out to the road in my pajamas that – he said, oh we have been waiting for this to happen. And I went to the fire station, Beryl Tani(?) was and she said oh, we have been waiting for this to happen. Well, if they were all waiting for this slide and everything, why wasn't something done? Why weren't the culverts open and patent – what did everyone do to protect the community after the fire? I know the fire was devastating, but you know, safeguarding the rest of us did not happen.

And that's all I have to say. It's been such a devastating experience for me. I've lost half my home. I am seventy years old now and it's – I have a tough road ahead.

- GF Thank you for your presentation – this might be what we saw photographs of yesterday. There was an engineering presentation about the areas that were now very susceptible to erosion and mudslides and they had a number of photographs of that particular event. It was the October 22nd rainstorm that they referred to and they showed the impact and they showed a number of houses that had the mud go into them and I am not sure that yours was one of them.
- JB Ours was the worst – everyone who has come to see it from PEP and that have said that – well everyone has said they've never seen anything like it. People are used to a flood, but they are not used to seeing mud – it just ruins everything.

- GF The point they were making was that this is a consequence of the burned out areas that – loss of roots to withhold the rain, the sudden rainfall and also I guess loss of cover. It leaves the impervious layer below which doesn't allow the rain to soak in and it just slides right off and down on the hills and that there are going to be risks for some time to come. So ...
- JB I appreciate that, but I mean I think the culverts could have been seen to.
- GF Yes, they showed photographs of culverts blocked and ...
- JB There was one they couldn't even find the one by my house.
- GF Umhmm. Have you spoke to the local municipality about this?
- JB I've spoken to everyone and everyone says oh, it's due to the fire, but the insurance, in B.C. I understand there is no insurance against flood or mudslide. Which, coming from Manitoba is very hard ---
- GF Have you check with your insurance company?
- JB Oh, yes, tremendous official letters and everyone coming out and ...
- GF Who is your insurance company, just out of ...
- JB Dominion of Canada – but it's the same with everyone – with all --- insurance companies.
- GF Thank you for your presentation.
- JB Thank you for listening to me.

B.C. Wildlife Federation: Thank you.

Phil Hallinnan:

Thank you Mr. Filmon, I would like to introduce a couple of colleagues who are sitting behind me and I'm not sure why they're sitting behind me. I think they are a little bit terrified, or whatever. One of them is Joan McKay – Joan McKay is the region president for the B.C. Wildlife Federation, Okanagan region, which is this particular region. She lives in Oliver and she is familiar with the Vaseux Lake Fire and John Holdstock is a past president of the Wildlife Federation who lives in Kelowna and is very familiar with the Kelowna fire, having witnessed it as it happened. Tony Toth is sitting over there, doing the audio visual presentation and I, as you know, am Phil Hallinnan, past president and land-use chair of the B.C Wildlife Federation.

We appreciate this second opportunity to talk to you. As you know when we were in Kamloops you asked us to go away and find some supporting documents for the recommendations we were making and again to repeat what our main recommendation is – is we believe that the province has to enter into a controlled burning program in order to prevent interface fires and in order to ensure the safety of residents in the communities that are in the fire zone in this particular area.

Tony is holding up a picture of a lodge pole pine stand. This one happens to be in the East Kootenays, but this lodge pole pine stand is sixty-five years old, it has absolutely no volume being increased in it because it is so close together and it is a common joke amongst our membership that rabbits need roadmaps to make their way through it. It's that thick. It's thicker than hair on a dog's back. Now a stand like that is contributing absolutely nothing to the forest area, it's removing grasslands, it's infilling the grazing lands, etc. So if you will give me the next picture, Tony – we are proposing that we begin to do an aggressive spacing program. This is an example – and I would love to say that was the same stand, but I don't think I could fool anybody by saying that.

But, an aggressive spacing program followed by a controlled burn in the spring that's low intensity would result in this immediately after the burn. Now this is a burn at a place called Johnson Lake in the Cranbrook area and as you see there is very little laddering on the trees so what happens if a fire does come through there a second time there is no, or very limited opportunity for it to climb the trees by the laddering and then become a crown fire, which is what happened in a large number of the fires here.

A year later, the area looks like this. The trees are, as you can see, getting bigger. There are open spaces between them, there is fords and brush there if in fact you wanted to have a wildlife area there where there was bighorn sheep, whether it's elk, moose, deer, or rabbits – bluebirds, whatever – they have open spaces. The sunlight reaches the ground and the timber itself becomes bigger because it has less competition from the former stands.

And finally, the picture we'd like to show you is what basically a fire maintained eco system naturally looks like. And this is an example of a high elevation eco system within the Kootenays itself. As you can see the fires have come through there, probably about every fifteen or twenty years – the brush is there, cyanosis(?) is there on the ground, there is grass there, it can be utilized by cattle and wildlife – it can be utilized by people who simply want to sit and enjoy the sun. So that's what we are looking at with controlled burns. We think that it is one of the safest ways of protecting the people as well as one of the cheaper ways.

Now you also asked us to talk about regulations and regulations by themselves are benign. They come about for really good reasons. Sometimes they come about because of the fact that the government wishes to implement one of their policies, they come about because of something that somebody overlooked and we need to fix it and they come about for all sorts of other reasons.

The difficulty with regulations is they are very similar to ammonia and chlorox bleach, in the fact that if you have a bowl full of ammonia and a bowl full of chlorox bleach, they can sit on a table side-by-side for years and years and cannot cause any problem – both of them do the job that they are required to do – the bleach will bleach clothes, the ammonia will clean windows really well. But, if you mix the two you get a fatal gas out of them. And what happens with regulations, very similarly, is that regulations will go together and they will move along and they will do their job that they are supposed to do and nothing happens until somebody needs to mix them. Then when somebody needs to fix them we find them in complete conflict.

It was interesting to us that the B.C. Government Employees Union talked about the bighorn sheep project. The bighorn sheep project would not occur anymore simply because of the softwood lumber dispute that is going on with the provincial government and that no one would be able to go into a timber area like we have just shown you, use the stumpage to pay for the controlled burn, simply because of the fact that under the softwood lumber agreement it has to go to public bid. And public bid – and there's our regulations now – public bid says that whoever wants to get it, gets it. Now if it isn't a good profit, if there isn't money in it, most people don't bid it. Secondly, the stumpage that we would have been dedicated if in fact you could use that can no longer be dedicated because it now has to go into general revenue and any money coming from the general revenue, again because of the Forests Act – any money coming from the general revenue then has to be voted on to go back and do the controlled burn. It has to be part of the Ministry of Forests vote in the legislature.

Now, most controlled burns in our particular case – we would have a controlled burn that maybe \$50,000 worth of money – our membership

voluntarily would probably provide \$45,000 of that in equipment, labour, etc., but we'd need \$5,000 for things like fuel, things like machine rentals – things like hiring forestry consultants to be able to lay the burn out – and we wouldn't be able to get that because no legislature in their right mind would vote a \$5,000 vote for the Ministry of Forests. So what we have to do in those cases is go in and bludgeon the District Manager who has got all sorts of things on his plate and sometimes can't find the \$5,000. So that's basically one of the impediments in regulations that we are seeing against control burns.

We also see smoke guidelines – for good reason – we try to have a clean air policy in this province because people have illnesses – whether they have asthma or whether it's just basically respiratory disease, it's on the increase in the province and controlled burns, done wrong, will often create a smoke situation in a valley that is stressful to people that are ill with those diseases. We happen to believe that in most cases, properly following the venting indexes, that that smoke will vent to the atmosphere and will not cause a problem. But we are fully aware of the fact that every once in a while the best laid plans of mice and men often wind up with a valley full of smoke. And at that particular time we would only be able to apologize to the people with respiratory health, and tell them it's the Ministry of Forests' fault.

The Ministry of Forests suppression policy has a very small preventive component and Mr. Heyman talked about that also – there are Forestry crews that are out there that are fire protection crews. They are not being utilized enough for controlled burns. Controlled burns themselves could be a part of their training process. No difference, for example, than city fire departments use old buildings, decrepit buildings to learn how to fight structure fire. There is no better way of teaching a forestry crew how to fight a forest fire than having a forest fire itself – under control of course. And as we said, the regulations regarding the use and sale of timber in B.C. are detrimental to using – to having volunteers dedicating the sale of timber from a piece of land that they are spacing or that they are developing with controlled burns simply because of the rules and regulations surrounded by the softwood lumber problem. And we are not going to solve the softwood lumber problem and neither are you, but it's just a matter of that is there and that is one of the impediments to the regulations.

Having said that, you also asked us to talk about insurance and you also asked us to talk about how we would deal with liability and I would ask Tony to speak about that at the moment.

Tony Toth:

I just want to add to your comments on the regulatory issues that we have actually come up with a twelfth recommendation in our two briefs now – and it reads the Federation recommends that the regulatory obligations of forest company licencees and contractors are responsible to uphold be reviewed with the intention of permitting more controlled burning to take place without penalty to the licencees. So that is a new recommendation we bring to your attention and consideration.

We have been talking about this and we really thought that there had to be some form of enabling legislation that allows a government to coordinate all these diverse interests and lo and behold on Monday Minister Dejong introduced Bill 91 – the Wildfire Act in the legislature and I believe it is going to be open for substantial consultation. A very preliminary review of it is quite favourable, Sections 68 to 79 basically gives the government the ability to make regulations and override disagreements between departments and ministries and we think it's probably a really good way to go. I mean the devil's(?) in the detail and we would certainly be interested in being part of the developing of the details related to that.

Phil is right – you asked us to check into the issue of liability concerns. If you will recall, in Kamloops we said that it is sometimes difficult to find volunteers and contractors to work on controlled burn projects because of the very high cost and the difficulty of obtaining liability insurance and so we volunteered to look into this for you.

We had a negative experience and a very positive experience – the negative experience was that we contacted the insurance industry who basically wouldn't talk to us. They wouldn't share information, wouldn't make comments, would not offer advice – would not do anything. Well, we got past that and fortunately in further inquiry we got in touch with the B.C. Ministry of Transportation and we found that they have an extensive amount of experience to offer for us to consider.

They have experience at arranging deals both of a type that retain risk and both of a type that transfer risk. The Vancouver Island Highway project was one where the Ministry of Transportation maintained all of the risk and then sub-delegated it to contractors and the cost of that insurance was quite cheap and it was quite good coverage and for control burden projects that require that element that's a model that can be considered. On the other hand the Transportation Ministry has experience where they have completely transferred the risk, such as in the highway maintenance contract that we have in this province. There, the contractor takes on all the project risk and incidentally they are finding that their insurance premiums are absolutely skyrocketing. That is two extremes of things you could combine. However, the best lesson from Transportation and Highways is that we learned about the adopt-a-highway program. The adopt-a-highway program is a program where

volunteers provide very valuable maintenance services to stretches of road or highway that would otherwise not get that attention at all. And, in order to save those folks harmless both in terms of liability for their own safety and in terms of liability for property damage they might cause to others, the ministry basically indemnified them for all eventualities at a very – well I don't know what it costs, but obviously it doesn't cost very much. As long as these folks are acting purely on behalf of public objectives then there is no cost to them and they are totally indemnified. And, if I didn't mention it before the Ministry basically underwrites all of that insurance internally. That's a model that should be extensively explored because it seems to me if you are going to involve volunteers like the membership of the B.C. Wildlife Federation local clubs that is certainly a way to accommodate our insurance and liability insurance concerns.

Those are the tasks you set us out to do and maybe you will want to ask us some questions about them, but before I go, or end – we had a very positive experience in Kamloops, both in terms of presentation and media attention, but in other ways as well. After our presentation we were approached by the Nicola Tribal Association and who told us that what we were suggesting was really, really a very good idea. We had wanted to advance a notion of controlled burns to prevent major conflagrations on a basis of science and practical experience and everything else. They of course informed us that they have been doing this for 25,000 years and it is a very happy situation where our science based approach meets with the age-old wisdom that they bring to the table. As a consequence, we actually agreed to enter into partnership with them to explore the possibility of developing fire suppression models, including controlled burns.

That's basically the end of our presentation, unless Phil you have something to add.

PH That's it.

TT Thanks.

GF Thank you very much, gentlemen, again for doing your homework and coming up with some very interesting and I think informative recommendations. It appears as though there is a growing consensus in favour of prescribed or controlled burns and the network keeps growing of people who are interested in it.

I haven't given up on the insurance industry – I had an opportunity to meet with some of their leadership in Toronto when I was there for other business last week and they are going to be coming before us as a stakeholder presentation. So I think that we can ask them a lot of the questions and talk about some of these concerns, or models that could be utilized for indemnifying volunteers or others who are acting as agents of the government

in doing some of this prescribed burning. But it appears as though – as I say there is a growing consensus and now we just maybe need a little flexibility from the insurance industry.

TT Some minimal amount of flexibility would be nice.

GF Yes. Thank you very much.

Now we have the presentation from the CBC on behalf of the media.

CBC – Marsha Lederman:

Good afternoon Mr. Filmon and other panel members. My name is Marsha Lederman, I am the coordinating news producer for CBC radio in British Columbia. It is essentially my job to oversee the news operations for the provincial and to run the newsroom on a day to day basis – that is the radio newsroom and we certainly are in communication with television at all times. I deal with reporters in the field, and I also deal with the news anchors back at the station. I am also in contact with the producers of our current affair shows – Daybreak is the current affair show, the morning show that is heard in this part of the province.

I was on the desk during most of our forest fire coverage this past summer and in particular on Friday, August first when the McLure Barriere fires grew out of control and evacuation orders were issued.

With me is Gary Symons, he is our reporter for southwestern B.C., based here in Kelowna and he covered most of the major forest fires this summer with the help of other reporters in the province.

We would like to thank you for allowing us to take part in this review. I think everyone involved in the wild fires of 2003 would agree that the media played a major role. People relied heavily on the media during this frightening time for raw information, for details about what had happened to their homes, to their neighbourhoods, to their friends, to their livestock, and people across the province and the country wanted to know what was happening here as well. We understand that we acted at times as a lifeline for people affected by the fires and this is especially true for radio which is the most immediate of media and it is available for people to listen to in their cars – perhaps as they are driving away to escape a fire that has come to their neighbourhood.

At the CBC however we do feel that we could have been even more effective during the fires. We were facing problems getting the information ourselves and thus we had trouble getting this imperative information out to our listeners. And that is why we are here today – to talk about our area of expertise, which is communications.

We do want to point out that there were indeed failures in the emergency communications system, particularly during the forest fires around Kamloops in early August. These failures in our experience are endemic to certain agencies which regularly respond to emergency situations. And these failures of communication strategy have to be addressed before B.C. faces another major disaster – whether it is a forest fire, or something else.

Now Gary Symons was our lead reporter on most of the fire situations in B.C. this summer and he had a front row seat, if you will, to see how

communications were handled or in some cases mishandled. So I will turn this over to him for the details.

Gary Symons:

Hello, glad to be back. You probably know me well enough for now, but for the sake of everyone else in the room, I will explain a little of my own background as it affects this particular issue. I have been a reporter in print and broadcasting for about fifteen years, working both – well here in the Okanagan, Toronto and elsewhere – a lot of that time has been spent covering fires and other types of disasters.

This summer in particular I covered most of the major fires in the province as well as the Farewell Creek Fire in Washington State. So I have some experience of how the communications issue was handled down in the U.S., substantially different from here.

In addition I have some direct experience with forest fires. When I was a lot younger and thinner I might mention, I was a contract forest fire fighter based in Prince George. The issue that compelled CBC to make a submission this year was the breakdown in the provincial communication strategy. We got together and we talked about what we could do better. Part of that was making a submission to help improve that process. The problem especially was in the McLure/Barriere fires during the first two weeks in August, but it wasn't limited to those areas. We had problems even in Kelowna, where the system was quite good.

I'll start with some of the positive things that I noticed. The fire information officers who worked on the major fires this year had a lot of direct fire experience and they had a positive attitude in dealing with the media, people like Kevin Matuga(?), Kirk Hughes, people like that that I have dealt with in the past. I also felt that in general fire information officers tried to give reasonable access to allow reporters into an active fire scene. This is absolutely vital because our task is to act as the eyes and the ears of our listeners. It is also a question of safety. To be quite frank, if government tries to block reasonable access to a fire scene, then reporters will eventually go around the fire lines without permission. I will have more about this in a moment.

The bad news is that in the first of the really catastrophic fires in McLure and Barriere, the communications system basically fell apart. All of the weaknesses in the system that caused small problems in small fires combined to cause huge problems during the large fires. I want to talk first about what happened from our perspective during those fires. I arrived there, the first CBC reporter on the scene early Friday morning shortly before the McLure Fire got out of control. At that time there was not very much information. I went to the air tanker base first and I got the sense that fire

officials there already knew that they were in big trouble. At that point I called for another reporter to come to Kamloops, we agreed I would get as close to the fire as possible and I would follow the fire visually and my colleague David French would stay in touch with the officials in Kamloops.

ML And if I could just add that I was on the desk back in Vancouver when we heard rumblings that Friday morning that the fires were getting out of control and Gary was calling in with all of the information he had. We were trying frantically to get in touch with Provincial Emergency officials and with officials of the town as well. We had trouble at first, we did finally manage to get in touch with a PEP official and we had that person on our one o'clock newscast. By then information began rolling in, faxes and phone calls, but the faxes were coming in quite a bit later than the evacuation orders were being issued. For example, I've brought two faxes with me. One fax talks about an evacuation that was issued at 17:45 hours, and it came over our fax machine at 18:41 – that is almost an hour later. And another fax talks about an evacuation order that was issued at 19:45 hours and we received it over our fax machine at 20:55 – that's more than an hour later. And, as you can appreciate that is precious time in such a situation.

I should mention that CBC is, by federal statute the emergency broadcaster for Canada and yet we had a continual struggle getting these evacuation orders sent to us so we could broadcast them to the affected areas in a timely manner. Furthermore, when we did receive them, the faxes were often densely worded and difficult at times to translate into easy to broadcast warnings, this was a particular problem during an emergency because often you are just taking the fax right off the fax machine, running it into a host who is reading it cold on the air and it was quite difficult to get through based on how it was written. There was no time to re-write them, we just wanted to get the information on the air.

I actually noticed that this was a particular problem with some of the Kelowna fires and I brought some examples of those for you to see as well. Now, if we are going to back to that first day of the McLure Barriere crises in August, I was on the desk, Gary was out on the scene along with our other Kelowna reporter David French, as he was saying, so I will let him continue on.

GS So I will just take you back to around about the time that David French, our second reporter, arrived on the scene. I was out watching the fire scene in McLure/Barriere, traveling back and forth and watching the fire scene when the Strawberry Hill fire ignited and started moving towards Raley(?). So that was my job, I didn't have a lot of contact with the officials at that point. But I do remember the first call I got from David French after there was a brief press conference and he said to me – if this pressor, our short hand for press conference, is any indicator, we are in big trouble. And at first I thought well

maybe he is exaggerating, he has had a rough day – actually he did have a rough day – but he told me the various emergency officials were clamping down on information and they refused to answer direct questions, and they acted in an antagonistic, confrontational fashion with the press. That wasn't what I was used to in most fire situations – I have seen it on occasion, but it is not what I am used to in a big fire situation. Unfortunately that pattern continued throughout the crisis around Kamloops. It did get better to some extent later on, but particularly in the beginning we had a big problem, I would say with pure attitude. Even the forestry people that I have dealt with for years would not give us good information and they completely shut down our access to the fire zone. I can remember being told that certain areas were not safe, when I could clearly see with my experience in fire fighting that those areas were perfectly safe – that there was no problem in going into those areas at all.

We were getting different responses from different emergency agencies. Some wanted to release more information but others did not think it was appropriate to release information about damage to houses through the media which surprised me somewhat. In particular, I found the Provincial Emergency Program, the Fire Commissioner's office and the Emergency Social Services to have a somewhat negative and antagonistic attitude toward the press, during particularly the early days of that crisis. Instead of being an exchange of information the press conferences turned into daily conflicts between reporters and officials. There was one exchange which has become infamous among all the reporters who worked on that fire. When reporters were demanding information about what was happening in Barriere, one of the officials replied that they didn't have to tell us anything and that we were only there as a "courtesy" to us. For someone who was involved in a major crisis involving tens of thousands of evacuees, that was a shocking thing to say, but it was very typical of the antagonism that occurred on a daily basis.

It felt to me that we were not seen as part of the solution to communicating with the public, and one thing that really bothered reporters was the complete lack of any reasonable access to the fire zone. I have to point out here that many of these reporters are extremely experienced in working in a dangerous environment. In fact, I think Mayor Walter Gray spoke about that yesterday. Some of us have even served in war zones and some of those people were there at that time. Like fire fighters some of us have the training and experience to work in a forest fire environment without putting ourselves or others at risk. And yet, even when we could see clearly that a particular area was safe to enter, officials continued to refuse access.

One result of this policy was that reporters started trying to ...
(Tape 3 of 4)

... that was simply not correct. The most notorious example was the report on August 2nd that the town of Barriere had been completely destroyed by fire. And you were in Barriere, you will recall the anger around that particular

broadcast. It also went out on the wire services. Even CBC radio which has high journalistic standards and rarely goes with reports that we cannot confirm did broadcast early on Saturday morning that there were unconfirmed reports – those were the words used when we looked at the transcripts – that the town of Barriere had been lost. We corrected that very quickly, but inaccurate and very frightening information was widely reported elsewhere – in the papers, on radio, on television and on the national news wire.

The reason is simple. We were unable to get the correct information from the officials in charge and there were no reporters allowed into the area to see for themselves.

That morning I called several officials at the emergency operations centre at locations throughout British Columbia in fact and asked them if this information was true or false and they all said they could not tell me. I finally asked one person – you can imagine I was getting a little frustrated – I finally asked one person – is that because you don't know or you just won't tell me. And he said if we did know we wouldn't tell you anyway.

I also went to the fire base in Kamloops and asked there but not a single person would talk to me; in fact they escorted me out because they said the fire base, strangely enough, was closed for the long weekend while these towns were burning.

So CBC rented a helicopter and flew to the town of Clearwater which is north of Barriere. We then borrowed a truck – luckily I have some friends in Clearwater – and drove south into Barriere itself. The cost of the truck I think was two day-break mugs. You can imagine our surprise when we arrived to find the town was not only intact, but there were dozen of fire fighters on scene as well as RCMP officers and paramedics. There were also even people wandering around looking for their pets. And while officials in Kamloops told us they had no information at all about the damage in Barriere, the RCMP actually had a list of the structures that had burned to date. They had it with them.

So that was how people finally found out their town and their homes were not destroyed. We made a broadcast as soon as we got back into range. Unfortunately this was a pretty typical story of how the media was handled during those fires.

And by the way, we also found the situation there was perfectly safe for reporters to work in and around the town, like fire fighters, people who are trained to deal in a fire – as a reporter we look for escape routes and there was a clear and viable escape route. There was never any danger of being trapped by the fire.

There were many other problems as well. One of them concerned the role of the Emergency Social Services. It was their job to process, house and feed the thousands of people who were evacuated from their homes – and I don't want to denigrate the work these people did, frankly the Provincial Emergency Program Emergency Social Services did overall a fantastic job throughout this crisis. One of the sad things is that the lack of good media coverage did not expose what a good job they did under very difficult circumstances but that is another story.

Like I said, they did a fantastic job of helping those who came looking for help but at the leadership level, the ESS appeared to have an attitude that the press had no business talking to evacuees, even if those evacuees actually wanted to speak with reporters. There was more than one occasion which I personally witnessed when a person walked out of the evacuation centre and tried to talk to reporters only to have ESS personnel yell at them and tell them not to speak with the press.

Compounding this problem, the ESS assigned several people to act as security guards but none of those people appeared to have any training for the job and they were given orders they could not possibly carry out without causing a conflict.

So, let me just explain that with an example. There was one day in particular when a lot of reporters were down at the evacuation centre in Sport Mart Place in Kamloops – these are among the most experienced reporters in the country – they know what their rights are – the ESS had set up barricades no reporters were allowed to cross. So we waited on the sidewalk outside. If people wanted to speak with us they could, I never saw any reporter harass an evacuee because frankly there were a lot of people who did want to talk to us – it wasn't necessary to be pushy about it – we just said would you like to talk to us – if they said no that was the end of it. In fact it was generally evacuees who were approaching us. However, some of the ESS guards came out and told us we were not allowed on the sidewalks or even the roads around the evacuation centre. This of course was ridiculous.

We were all standing in a public place and we had every right to be there and yet over the course of an hour guards came out and yelled at reporters, telling them they would be forced to move and might be arrested. Of course the police on the scene refused to have anything to do with it. They apologized later. It ended up with a yelling match between the guards and the reporters that was broadcast on television, on radio and reported in the local media. These kinds of conflicts happened for days on end.

Another point I wanted to make is about the Thompson-Nicola Regional District. I do think they meant well – I know they meant well. But the TNRD's media system is woefully inadequate and it remains so today. They have no trained media personnel and the result was that they were of little use in

getting information to the media. They had no idea what we need to do our job. The system was so poor overall that when the Mayor of Kamloops told me that not even he was told what was happening in his own city – he was unable to give accurate information and he is the mayor of the city in which these evacuees were being sent.

One final point before leaving this particular crisis – the government had a very poor system for issuing evacuation alerts and orders. It appeared to me that they were relying on personnel who had little local knowledge of the area. In fact many were based in Victoria – they had no idea what the local region was like. And, as Marsha mentioned, these were at time quite dense communications, they were difficult to read through on the air. So that was our experienced in Kamloops on the communications side. I should mention that some of the problems we saw there we also saw to a lesser extent in places like Cranbrook and Nelson.

Now I will move on to what we experienced in Kelowna during the fires there in mid August. From the very first moment that I arrived, it was obvious that Kelowna a very efficient and smooth-running operation – at least at the city level. I know from my own inquiries that the City of Kelowna and the Central Okanagan Regional District took a very different approach to crisis management than did the Thompson-Nicola Regional District. For at least five years the Kelowna area has been working on its disaster management plan and the use of media communications was seen as a vital part of that plan. Both the city and the Regional District have full time staff people who are high caliber former journalists. I cannot say enough about how well the team handled communications. In particular, Karen Cairns(?) with the city and Bruce Smith with the region. They were in constant touch with the media and they always made information available. In fact we got to many e-mails from Karen Cairns that the joke was that she was going to be in trouble for spamming us. That's not to say there were no problems in Kelowna, but it wasn't really with the city.

Unfortunately emergency social services did not follow the lead of the other agencies, as least as far as media communication – the ESS still took the view that reporters were not welcome and as a result there were a number of unpleasant confrontations between reporters and the ESS volunteer guards. In one case we had an ESS volunteer actually hitting one of our vehicles repeatedly with a baton, even though the vehicle was legally parked in exactly the area we had been told we were allowed to be. In another, I was called a scumbag and a vulture – I will let you decide whether those are true – by one of the ESS volunteers while I was conducting an interview and the people I was talking to were told that they should say nothing to the media.

Actually, we had another example that was interesting – another reporter – Graham Stevens – his assigned was to go to find positive stories about the volunteers who were helping out. So he wanted to talk to, for example, the

woman who was running the Salvation Army effort. He was told that he was not allowed on the property around the Parkinson Rec – he didn't want to interview evacuees, he wanted to talk to some of the people running the operation, yet he was not allowed on the property – he was run off by guards.

That was the kind of thing we were running into and certainly CBC was not the only one that ran into it.

Still, in general, the situation was a text book example of how to hand communications during an emergency situation. So, some important points on the Kelowna strategy that we noted are as follows.

Officials such as Mayor Walter Gray and Fire Chief Gerry Zimmerman told us everything they knew as soon as they knew it. There were clearly identified individuals who the media could call for information, both for the emergency operations centre and forestry.

Media personnel kept us constantly informed of every development and when they made a mistake they corrected it right away. That was very important. It didn't happen all the time in Kamloops.

CBC reporter David French told me one story about Karen Cairns who worked for the city, he found a mistake in one of the releases that were sent out. He called her right away, she made the correction right on the spot while he was standing there and in less than one minute she had a correction sent out to every media organization in B.C. – which helps explain why I had 700 e-mails on my machine.

Media personnel also provided constant interviews. Bruce Smith of the regional district was working 30 hour shifts in some cases, doing one interview after another to keep people constantly informed. And perhaps as importantly, he provided a face for the Regional District that allowed people to know that officials were keeping an eye on things 24 hours a day.

Local people with knowledge of the city were in charge of putting together the evacuation orders; there were fewer mistakes and oversights. Now we heard earlier that these had to be cleared through the Fire Commissioner however the local people went through the maps and they did a very good job of identifying the streets that we affected.

The Ministry of Forests also changed their tactics. They knew the closed access policy around Kamloops was a mistake. They fixed it in Kelowna. Just two days after the fires ripped through south Kelowna, officials provided access to dozens of reporters and they used a convoy of city buses. Unlike the situation in Barrier, the residents in this city could see first-hand what happened to their homes. There is no doubt that this was very traumatic and probably some people didn't like seeing their homes on television but in my experience it was not nearly as traumatic as the terrible ordeal of not knowing, as we saw in Barriere. Also as a result of this access policy, there were no cases of reporters trying to break through city lines. We had all the access we needed to do our jobs, and we could still stay safe because we were with officials at the time.

That about closes what I have to say and with that I would like to turn the mike back to Marsha Lederman.

ML Thanks Gary. Well that concludes the factual part of our submission but as I said earlier, we are not here just to air our concerns. We want to find solutions to this problem and we hope to be part of that solution. That is why we are here today.

Now it appears to us that there are certain provincial agencies with a poor grasp of emergency communications although it's also fair to say some of these same agencies did a much better job as they learned through the experience. The agencies with the most problems in this regard include the provincial emergency program, the fire commissioner and emergency social services. We found that many of the regional districts do not have trained communications personnel, nor do they have a clear communications policy.

Here are our recommendations:

- 1) That the provincial government launch a review of emergency communications with the goal of creating an effective emergency communications system that can be used anywhere in the province.
- 2) Regional Districts and government should be encouraged to hire or train personnel who can deal effectively with the media during a crisis.
- 3) Local government should keep a current contact list for all media in case of such an emergency, one person or group of persons should be assigned the responsibility of faxing or e-mailing current evacuation orders and other important information.
- 4) We feel emergency social services management far exceeded their authority in trying to have reporters removed from public places. We recommend ESS managers be trained in the limits of their power during an emergency.
- 5) That the Ministry of Forests and other ministries that might be involved in an emergency undertake a review of the policy providing access to fire scenes for journalists. We are hoping the lessons learned by the ministry in Kelowna this summer will not be forgotten the next time around – if there is a next time around.
- 6) One root cause of the poor communications appeared to be the lack of a clear chain of command. It needs to be made clear to the media who is in charge. Our recommendation is that the British Columbia government reviews its command structure so that the media can go to a central place for information and that we know where that place is.

Mr. Filmon, we believe that keeping the media informed is the best way to keep the public informed. We hope that the lessons learned this summer will translate into better communication in the even of any future disaster.

That concludes our submission.

GF Thank you very much Marsha and Gary – incidentally Gary is the only one besides me, I think, and Jim Sproul, who has been at every one of these meetings and so we appreciate the commitment to following through the entire process right from the summer all the way through to the end of this review.

The communications issue was clearly something that I knew about before we started the process. I went through a couple of hundred pages of media scans on the plane on the way – my first trip here, when the announcement was made. And so it was pretty clear that there was a change along the way that the access was very, very restrictive and by the time we were in Kelowna there was a reasonable communications strategy, although you have filled in a few other things here with respect to ESS and so on. So there is a big job to be done. There is no question in my mind that communications has to be a section of the report that highlights experiences and arrives at conclusions and makes recommendations.

And so, based on all of the things that you have indicated, I will make one little comment and say that I understand from 25 years in public office the absolute need and necessity for good communications and for the partnership that must exist between those who are in a position of responsibility and authority and those who are the vehicle by which the information gets disseminated to the public. I can't always claim that I did it right, so I am not going to be one to start preaching. But having said that I also know that there is a direct relationship between not having access and wrong information getting out, and so I say though that there is a responsibility on the part of the media to make sure that wrong information doesn't get out even if you are completely frustrated and totally unable to do your job. Getting out the wrong information doesn't help anybody.

Unfortunately I guess the frustration levels led to that in this instance and there is no question that people at Barriere were very, very upset. In fact I mentioned a person in Osoyoos who said that one of the towns was destroyed and I said wait a second now, that's what the people in Barrier are continuing to fight – the fact that their friends and relatives right across Canada were in terror over the new report that went out, and we want to make sure that is never repeated again. But it shows you how long the thing lasts. This was in Osoyoos on Monday night that somebody made reference to that.

ML We could not agree more and that is why we are here.

GF Well, thank you for taking the time to go through thoroughly, give us the entire process and also your recommendations which we certainly do appreciate.

ML Thank you.

GF Do you have a copy of your comments? (Yes) Thank you.